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THE GOVERNOR OF ENGLAND

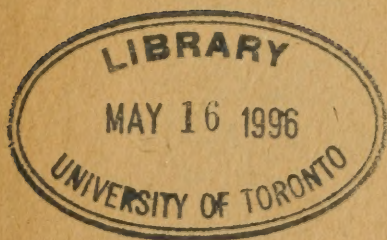
BY

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CONTENTS

PART I

THE CAUSE

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE SUMMONS	7
II. THREE YEARS LATER	15
III. MR. PYM AND AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE	24
IV. THE QUEEN'S POLICY	31
V. THE FALL OF THE GREAT MINISTER	40
VI. THE KING FAILS	47
VII. AUTUMN, 1641	56
VIII. THE NEWS FROM IRELAND	63
IX. JOHN PYM AND THE KING	71
X. LORD FALKLAND'S ADVICE	81
XI. THE FIVE MEMBERS	89
XII. NOTTINGHAM	95

PART II

THE MAN

I. A LEADER OF MEN	101
II. THE QUEEN'S FAREWELL	111
III. THE GREAT FIGHT	119
IV. THE DEAD CAVALIER	128
V. LIEUTENANT-GENERAL CROMWELL AND HIS GOD	136
VI. THE KING DREAMS	142
VII. LOYALTY HOUSE	150
VIII. THE KING'S FOLLY	160
IX. THE END OF THE WAR	167

PART III

THE CRISIS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE ISSUE WITH THE KING	172
II. THE KING'S PLOTS	180
III. LIEUTENANT-GENERAL CROMWELL, ROYALIST	187
IV. THE KING AT BAY	195
V. LIEUTENANT-GENERAL CROMWELL, REPUBLICAN	202
VI. PRESTON ROUT	209
VII. THE CONSTANCY OF THE KING	216
VIII. IN THE BALANCE	222
IX. BY WHAT AUTHORITY?	231
X. EXIT THE KING	243

PART IV

THE ACHIEVEMENT

I. 'THE CROWNING MERCY'	252
II. THE TALK IN ST. JAMES'S PARK	259
III. EXIT THE PARLIAMENT	267
IV. 'THE NEW ORDER'	275
V. HIS HIGHNESS	283
VI. MAJOR-GENERAL HARRISON	291
VII. LADY NEWCASTLE	300
VIII. THE LADY ELISABETH	307
IX. EXIT HIS HIGHNESS	315

THE GOVERNOR OF ENGLAND

PART I

THE CAUSE

‘Of the two greatest concernments that God hath in the world, the one is that of religion and of the preservation of the professors of it; to give them all due and just liberty; and to assert the word of God.

‘The other thing cared for is the civic liberty and interest of the nation.

‘Which, though it is, and I think it ought to be, subordinate to the more peculiar interest of God, yet it is the next best God hath given men in this world; and if well cared for, it is better than any rock to fence men in their other interests.’—OLIVER CROMWELL.

CHAPTER I

THE SUMMONS

ON a certain day in November, a misty day with sharpness under the mist, a gentleman was walking out of the little town of St. Ives, which stood black and bleak above the bleak, black waters of the Ouse and the mournful clusters of bare, drooping willows.

It was late in the afternoon, and there chanced to be no one abroad in the grazing lands outside the town save this one gentleman who walked eastward towards the damp, vaporous fen country.

The horizon was brought within a few yards of him by the confining mist, and, as he walked farther from St. Ives, the town began to be also rapidly lost and absorbed in the general dull greyness, so that when he turned at last (sharply and as if with some set purpose or some live inner prompting), the dwelling-houses, the river, bounded by the barns and palings, had all disappeared, and

remained only visible the erect, tall steeple of the church, pointing into the grey sky from the dark obscured willows and dark obscured town and unseen river.

And though he walked rapidly, yet this tower and steeple of the old, humble, enduring church continued long in sight, for it was uplifted into the higher, clearer air, and was in itself substantial and massive.

For the high-wrought mood of this gentleman who, as he advanced farther into utter solitude, so continually looked back, this steeple of God's mansion had a deep spiritual meaning; it rose out of darkness and vapour and obscurity as the mandate of God rose, the one clear thing, out of the confusions and strifes and clamours of the world.

The mandate of God, ay—surely the one thing that mattered, the one thing to be followed and obeyed—and when the summons and command were clear there was great joy in obedience; but what when, as now, the order was not given, when God remained mute and the soul of His creature was enclosed in darkness even as town and fields were now enclosed in the cloudy exhumations of the earth?

When the steeple was at last hidden from his keenest glance, the gentleman stopped and, leaning against a paling, gazed over the short expanse of foggy ground visible to him, alone and terribly lonely in his soul.

A deep melancholy lay upon him, a melancholy almost inseparable from his unbending, austere, and sombre creed, a melancholy of the spirit, black and awful, neither to be ignored nor reasoned with—a spiritual disease to which he had been prone since his earliest youth, and which became at times almost intolerable and scarcely to be endured by any mortal, however stout-hearted.

Had any one come up through the November mist and noticed and observed this gentleman leaning on the rough willow paling, he would have seen nothing to suggest a gloomy mystic nor one struggling with the anguished tribulations of the soul.

He was, to the outward eye, a man in the prime of life, of the type commonly accepted as English, and, indeed, possible to no other nation in the world, of medium height

and the appearance of medium strength, his obvious gentility gracing his plain, sober, frieze clothes, and the little sword at his side giving the one courtly touch to his habit, which otherwise, with plain band and ribbonless hat, might have seemed too much that of a mere farmer, for his high boots, now mud-caked, had seen good service. He wore no gloves on his browned hands, and his hair, of the dusk English brown, was cut in a country fashion, and worn no longer than his shoulders.

His face was unusual, yet might have been that of an ordinary man, the features powerful, the nose bluntly aquiline, the mouth set steadily, the Saxon grey-blue eyes rather overbrowed, giving the countenance a glooming air, the chin and jaw massive, the complexion tanned to the glowing natural colour of a healthy fair man past any bloom of youth, and unused to the softness of town life.

Not a handsome face, but not uncomely, and remarkable chiefly (now, at least) for a certain quiet look, not a slumbering look, but rather the look of one whose soul is locked and sealed.

Such was his appearance, and his history was as simple and unpretending as his visage and his attire; nothing had ever happened to him that he should stand there now sunk in torments of melancholy. His life had been smooth, uneventful, successful; he had been born and bred in Huntingdon, and never gone beyond the borders of that county save when he had sat, a silent borough Member, in His Majesty's last Parliament at Westminster, nine years ago, and he was in that happy position of being well known and respected, in his own little world, as one of the largest landowners in St. Ives, and utterly unknown to the great world where fame is distraction and confusion. He was tranquil in an honourable obscurity, happy in his wife, his children, of an old well-placed family, well connected, and of considerable local influence and fair repute. He could himself remember that His late Majesty, twice coming through Huntingdon, had each time been entertained by his grandfather at his manor house, on the first occasion with much splendour, when the King came from Scotland to take up his new crown.

In his own business he had prospered ; the lands he had bought at St. Ives and which he farmed himself, reclaiming them with patience from the fen, had well repaid his labour, and he might count himself well off, and even, for this quiet spot, wealthy.

Therefore it might have been supposed that this man, midway now through life, would have considered his honourable labour, his honourable profits, his serene existence, his fair placement and good report among his neighbours, his prospect of quietness and respect and comfort to the end of his days, and have been content, for he was without ambition.

But he was not satisfied with his own material happiness, for great new forces and powers were abroad in the world struggling together, and this struggle echoed again and again in the heart of the man who stood against the willow paling, gazing into the November mist that shrouded Erith Bulwark and the fen country.

The country had been long at peace, lulled and tranquil after that great triumph of the Reformation of the Church, and that demonstration of material power which had silenced the pretensions of Spain and warned the world what England was.

But Elizabeth was now a generation dead, and the grandson of the Papist Mary sat on the Tudor's throne with a Frenchwoman, a Mary and a Papist too, beside him, and the Church was becoming again corrupt, the power of the bishops daily higher, troubles in Church and State increasing, liberty, civil and religious, threatened—for the King and his ministers had governed nine years without a Parliament, contrary to the laws and ordinances of the realm of England.

This Huntingdonshire gentleman knew that the devil was in these things, that God was surely with the oppressed, with those who sought and found a purer worship, with those, daily increasing, who accepted that teaching of John Calvin which had inspired the Hollanders to throw off the bloody yoke of Alva and the Inquisition, with those who had ventured to plead humbly for liberty of conscience at the conference of Hampton and had been denied by King and bishops with threats and scorn, and

had gone about since, ridiculed and persecuted, nicknamed 'Puritans.'

This man knew this as he knew the King and the bishops, the ministers, and the followers of these, were dealing with things idolatrous and horrible, stepping into the fore-courts of hell.

Ay, and taking the nation with them. How was that to be prevented—which way did God appoint?

That was the question which troubled the personal melancholy of the man in whose heart it flashed—for the King was King by Divine appointment, and if he had lent his weight and authority to these ways of misrule and oppression, idolatry and Papistry, who was to argue with him or withstand him?

Who was to appeal from the King to God?

The man in the frieze habit was conscious of a burning flame or light in himself which urged him to step forward for this distracted England's succour. But he received no summons. The face of the Lord was veiled and he was but a poor soul, possibly damned, with no knowledge of what destiny the Highest had prepared for him. He felt himself in blackest chaos; his soul, which had ever striven to obtain God's grace, now seemed tossed far from mercy on the black waters of despair.

To him, and especially in this mood, the present world was nothing; he was not given to metaphor, but in his thoughts he compared the world to a little plank he had once seen stretched across a deep and angry stream, and arched above with fairest blossoming trees. The plank in itself was insignificant, and useful only to support those who might for a moment stand thereon—the important thing was to save oneself from the black, dangerous abysses beneath, and gain, somehow, the flower-crowned heights that the trees veiled and decked.

Whether the plank be rough or smooth, narrow or wide, mattered not at all, if only one were enabled to tread thereon straightly. So it mattered not a jot to this gentleman what his station, chances, or fortunes might be in this world. Am I damned or saved? was the question that held the heart of his torment and mingled with it was another: Is there not that in me, unworthy as I am, which

God might make use of to save these poor people in poor England now? Yea, though I am not bred to be a lawyer or a soldier, am I not conscious of *something* within me which might fit me for this work if God should call me to it?

But the heavens were black and mute to his intense prayers and his humble endeavours to commune with God, and he went his obscure way in wretchedness of heart, never faltering from the stern composure of his belief that the Lord had preordained all things, and that no act of any man's could alter a jot what was to befall.

The King and the bishops, poor puppets, believed in Freewill and such heresies of Arminianism and Popery, but this Calvinist, standing in the November vapour, *knew* that he was but a helpless weapon to be used as God might direct; *knew* he was saved or damned before his birth, and that no deed of his could alter the Divine fiat; *knew* he was but a machine into which the Holy Spirit might blow some sparks, but which at present was cold and empty.

In this moment he felt hell very close beneath his feet, the earth seemed a mere crust over that awful region, a crust that might easily break and spew forth devils, while the over-arching heavens seemed lost, lost beyond mortal attainment.

A long shudder shook his strong body, he covered the steadfast grey eyes with his rough hand, and leant heavily against the paling.

A cousin of his, a man not unknown in Parliament, had recently defied the King; had refused, being armed and at the head of his tenantry, to pay the ship-money, that being a tax (one of many) levied by the King without the consent of the people of England, Parliament being in abeyance; and this country gentleman had appealed to the laws, asking, 'By what authority?' and when they said, 'the King,'—had answered, 'that was not sufficient, for the laws and the nation were above the King, and alone he could enforce nothing.'

Which statement made men stare, for it was near treason, and the speaker of these words was now on his trial, and his cousin, fighting through his own tribulations, thought

of him and of the issue that hung upon the verdict pronounced upon his case.

If the judges found the ship-money tax illegal, then had civil liberty won indeed a victory ! If they found that the King was above the laws and could by his sole authority do what he pleased in Church and State, why, where was England and those poor few within her borders who truly sought the Lord ? Yet not so much even this tremendous issue touched the soul of the melancholy Calvinist as the thought—What he did, could not I do, ay, and more ?

If one, a gentleman of good repute, may thus challenge even the sacred authority of the King, may not another, of the same good blood and stalwart faith, the Lord bidding him, accomplish something ?

The thought was like a tiny ray of light penetrating his deep melancholy ; he moved from his cramped position, shook his frieze cloak on which the drops of moisture hung thick, and looked about him.

Something to do—something to labour for—something to save and guard for the Lord in this old realm where all had gone so crooked of late. . . .

The fire that never lay very deep beneath the stagnation of his melancholies mounted clear and bright in his soul.

He turned about to where he knew the church stood, and, stately Englishman as he was, he flung out his hands wide with the unconscious gesture of strong passion, and, looking upwards through the drizzling mist with that inner eye which perfectly beheld the choired rows of Paradise and the multitude about the Throne, he cried out aloud—

‘ Lord, wilt thou not choose *me* also for this service ? ’

The little light in his soul increased into a gleam of hope ; he turned his back on the fens and Erith Bulwark, and retraced his steps towards St. Ives, crossing the lands of Slepe Hall, which he rented, and coming soon again in view of the quiet, sombre little town, and of the garden wall enclosing his own riverside house.

The mist now began to waver and lift, and to be over-coloured with a play of light, and when he reached the church the day was almost normal fair.

In his soul, too, was the struggle stilled ; a curious

apathy, a pause in spiritual experience, enveloped him. He stood motionless for a moment, for he felt physically weak and his legs trembled under him.

As he halted so, not a yard from the entrance to the church, a solitary horseman disturbed the dulness of the street—a young yeoman farmer returning from market at Huntingdon town. On seeing the gentleman he reined in the stout grey he rode, and very respectfully raised his hat.

Why, sir,' he said, 'there is great news in Huntingdon. Why, Mr. Cromwell, the news of the verdict is abroad!'

The other had no need to ask what verdict. In all England men spoke of 'the trial'—the trial of John Hampton for refusing to pay the King's tax.

'Well?' he asked, and his serious face was pale.

'Mr. Cromwell,' answered the young man dismally, 'he is to pay the twenty shillings.'

For a moment Mr. Cromwell was silent, then he spoke slowly—

'So we have no hope in those who administer the laws?'

'They have put the laws beneath His Majesty,' said the farmer eagerly. 'All is to be as he wills, with no talk of a Parliament at all—so the lawyers in London say, sir—and Mr. Hampton is to pay the twenty shillings which goeth with many another honest man's money into the coffers of the bishops and the Papist Queen.'

'Ay, so the lawyers say,' returned Mr. Cromwell, 'but this is a matter which England'—he slightly stressed the word—'must decide.'

The young farmer, flushed and important with his great news, saluted again, and rode on to report all over the countryside how the protest of Mr. John Hampton to the laws of England against the tyranny of the King had failed.

Mr. Cromwell remained standing by the church a moment, then he wandered off into one of his own fields near by and entered a great barn which stood there, and remained silent in the dimness of the interior, which was fragrant from the scent of last summer's hay stored in the lofts.

So the Law had decided in favour of the King, who might now levy ship-money and whatever tax else he chose—and there would be the Tower and the pillory, the branding and the fine, for those who dared resist, as there had been for Prynne and Bastwick who had dared to criticize the ritual of Archbishop Laud.

Mr. Cromwell felt a strange sparkle in his blood; he paced to and fro on the rough floor, strewn with the dried husks of the last harvest, and clasped his hands on his rough coat-breast and then dropped the left to his sword. As he clasped the plain hilt, a sudden exaltation shot into his heart, his spirit leapt suddenly to a greater height than any it had touched before. And then it happened.

A dazzle of unbelievable light opened before his inner vision, he fell on his knees and, from a sword of fire, received the accolade of God. . . .

‘Lord, I am saved!’ he cried. ‘I am in Grace! And I am chosen to be Thy servant in this work which is to be done in England. . . .’

When the glamour faded he rose, staggering, and wept a little for joy.

It was a tremendous moment of his life.

Then he went home across the wet fields, outwardly an ordinary gentleman, inwardly a soul newly awake to salvation, bearing a burning light no more to be quenched until it returned to Heaven.

CHAPTER II

THREE YEARS LATER

‘SIR,’ said the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, who had been called hotly from that country to counsel the imperative needs of the King, ‘I am come to give you advice, and I tell you first, and plainly, never man came to so lost a business.’

As he spoke they stood looking at each other, master and servant, King and minister, in a little cabinet of Whitehall, that glittered with richness and flash of deep colour, like a casket of jewels.

Beyond the deep square window lay the gardens, the houses, the straight reach of river, and London, beneath a quivering August haze ; no discord of sight nor sound disturbed the peaceful harmony of this scene, and in the palace gardens the trees rustled and the flowers gave forth their strength in sweet odours unvexed by human noise or hustle ; yet my lord, gazing out on this sunshine, knew well enough that the city, whose towers rose beyond the sleepy river, was nursing forces that might soon gather sufficient deadly power to sweep him, and all he stood for, into nothingness. He bore himself erect, and the courage that was his strongest quality showed in his haughty pose, in the expression of his dark, disdainful face, in the quiet smile with which he spoke his gloomy pronouncement.

He received no immediate answer, and in the pause of silence he glanced attentively at the master whom he had served so whole-heartedly and believed in so intensely—for such as he must always believe intensely in the principle for which they fight.

Charles was leaning against the mullions ; melancholy and levity were strangely mingled in his mien. In stature and make he was slight, in dress extravagant, his dove-grey silk was embroidered with seed pearls and gold, and a deep collar of exquisite lace was fastened by two gold tassels at the lacing of his doublet.

Every Englishman, first seeing him, noted how foreign he was in appearance. Though brought up as one of the nation whom he was to rule, blood was here stronger than breeding, the powerful French-Scotch strain of his famous name, the influence of his gay, foreign mother, showed in his elegance, his refinement, his somewhat sad dignity, which gave him an air as if he were too great to be proud outwardly, but was beyond measure proud inwardly.

His hair, of the renowned Stewart auburn colour, fell full and soft round a face that was slightly worn and troubled, but handsome and composed still—a face that was too charming to be the index of a mind, or more than a mere seductive disguise for whatever manner of man lay beneath.

My lord had served him long and known him as intimately as any man save my late murdered Duke of

Buckingham, but even my lord, now it was coming to the issue of their joint policies, could not be quite sure what the King would do,—where he would be adamant and where give way, where he would fail, and where he would stand firm.

‘A lost business,’ Charles repeated at last. He had a blood-red cameo on the little finger of his fair left hand, and turned it about as he spoke; it was the only jewel he wore save a long pearl in his right ear.

‘Sir, I call it no better than lost. The army unexercised and unprovided, great disloyalty abroad, the Scots in a rebellion which is daily more successful, the people mightily disaffected, and all in a clamour for a Parliament—and I would to God, sire, that you had not dismissed the last one, for it was better than any you are like to have called together at this turn.’

‘I will,’ said Charles, ‘call none at all.’ He knew secretly that his minister was right, and he already regretted the moment of spleen in which, after a three weeks’ sitting, he had dismissed the first Parliament he had called for eleven years—had called in desperation for aid against the Scots—for he saw that what Strafford said was true, and that in the present temper of the nation he was unlikely to get men so loyal in their temper as even the Members of the so-called Little Parliament had been.

‘Yea, call none at all,’ returned the Earl, ‘and where are we for money? Is there any king or country to whom we can turn? Have we not asked in vain even at Rome—even from the merchants of Genoa?’

‘The money must be raised in England,’ said the King. He would not put it into words, but to himself he was forced to admit that no foreign power nor personage would lend money without security—and security Charles was quite unable to give; for in the eyes of Europe a King of England, acting without his Parliament, was a person by no means to be seriously regarded.

‘Then,’ returned Strafford, in the tone of a man who courageously accepts defeat, ‘your Majesty must call another Parliament.’

Charles moved from the window and seated himself before a small bureau of dark wood, inlaid with mother-o’-

pearl ; he rested his delicate face in his delicate hand and gazed mournfully, almost reproachfully, at his minister.

‘ You accuse me of failure,’ said the Earl, answering the look in his master’s eyes. ‘ Well, I have failed.’

Certainly he had ; his famous policy, which he had proudly called ‘ Thorough,’ had fallen to pieces before the first demonstration of the popular anger, and his attempt to establish the English monarchy as the monarchies of Spain and France were established had come to nothing. He was not the man to shirk blame or responsibility, and he did not reflect, as he might have reflected, that had Charles whole-heartedly trusted Strafford as Strafford had whole-heartedly served Charles, the endeavour to force the policies of Richelieu on the English people might have approached nearer accomplishment, or at least have avoided a failure so disastrous.

The King did not speak ; he was not in a mood to be generous with his servant, for his own humiliation was very bitter and would be bitterer still if he were forced to call another Parliament. The rebellious Scots, resisting his attempt to thrust Episcopalian bishops upon them, had advanced as far as Durham, and the English, far from flying to arms to resist the invader, were showing obviously enough that they considered the Scottish cause as theirs, and would indeed soon follow their northern neighbour’s example and call a Parliament of their own did Charles not call one for them.

So much the daily petitions, and the demeanour of John Pym, the ringleader of the malcontents, and those country gentlemen who had rallied round him in the Little Parliament, by refusing supplies for the Scottish war unless the country’s grievances were first redressed, attested.

Strafford took his eyes from his master and looked across the garden to the shimmering river. He was a more resolute, a more brilliant, a bolder man than the King. He saw more clearly and gauged more accurately than his Majesty the strength of the opposition now growing in England against the royal prerogative and the pretensions of the Anglican clergy, and he saw also that in the ensuing struggle he stood in the forefront of the battle and was marked out by Pym and his followers

as the first and principal victim. Once he had been of Pym's party, and when he had seceded to the King, Pym had told him, 'You may leave us, but we shall not leave you while your head is on your shoulders.'

He had only been Thomas Wentworth then, and now he was Earl of Strafford, and, under the King, the greatest man in the three realms, but the threat recurred to him now as his eyes rested on the dazzle of the river flowing swiftly towards the Tower.

He knew he had come to England to play a desperate game with John Pym, and that the stakes were, '*Thy head or my head.*'

The King startled him from his sombre thoughts by a light blow with clenched hand on the bureau, and by rising abruptly.

'Is there no one to defend me against these rebellious Commons?' he cried, as if his reflections had become desperate and were no longer to be borne in silence.

'I have,' said Strafford, 'done my utmost. I am the best-hated man in England, sire, for what I have done to enforce your authority. But if none of my expedients avail your Majesty, if the people will not take a debased coinage, if the train-bands refuse to arm—if all the support of my Archbishop but end in his fleeing his palace, pursued by the people——'

'The people!' broke in Charles, 'always the people!'

'Ay,' said Strafford, 'always—the people.'

'And what, my lord,' asked the King, 'is your advice now?'

'Advice?' echoed the Earl; the sun now fell full over his fine face and showed it to be near as colourless as the rich lace collar he wore. 'There is no advice to be given but this—Your Majesty must call a Parliament.'

The King's mobile mouth curved scornfully.

'And what will be the first action of this new assembly?' he demanded. 'To present a petition against my Lord Strafford as once a petition was presented against my Lord Buckingham. Do you not know how the nation deals with my friends?'

'Sire,' replied the minister, with a great sweetness of manner that came with endearing charm from one of his

stern and bold demeanour, 'if Your Majesty calls me friend, it is enough. What shall I fear when the King stands by me?'

'Yes, yes,' replied Charles, in sudden agitation; 'they should not have had Buckingham, and they shall not have you—rest assured, my lord. Guard only from another Felton, and I will protect you from these baying hounds that hate us so.'

He held out his hand and Strafford clasped and kissed it with sincere reverence. Not only was the King his beloved master, but the symbol of that sacred and Divine authority which he believed to be the finest form of government, and which his strong genius had so devotedly and strenuously served.

The King, who seemed shaken with some sudden emotion, turned away, pressing his handkerchief to his lips, and at that moment the door opened, the leathern hanging that concealed it was lifted, and a lady entered the cabinet—a lady frail and flowerlike to the eye, attired in a gown of white silk with knots of pink; a lady with a radiant face of the most delicate hues and shadings, whose fine black ringlets were adorned with a braid of pearls worked in the likeness of the fleur-de-lis on a pink ribbon.

Her countenance wore a look of fatigue and anxiety under the animation of her expression, but, though she had lost the dewy loveliness of her girlhood, she still appeared fragrant and youthful, an exquisite, royal creature whose Bourbon blood showed in the quick, impetuous pride of her carriage, while she had the great black eyes of her Medici mother, and something, too, of the Italian in her gay liveliness.

At her entrance the King turned towards her with instant eagerness. He had at this time three counsellors—Strafford, Laud, and the Queen—and any one who looked upon him now as he took his wife's hand and led her to the deep-cushioned window-seat, would not have doubted which had the most influence of the three. Henriette Marie was now, as she had ever been, the most powerful influence in her husband's life.

She looked now from the King to the Earl and said quickly, with a pronounced French accent—

'What advice does my lord give in this perverse issue?'

'He saith there is nothing for it, Mary, but to call another Parliament.'

The Queen stamped her white-shod foot.

'*Mon Dieu!*' she exclaimed, with her eyes afire and a heat as of fire in her voice also. 'Are we to stretch our necks out for the *canaille* to put their feet thereon?'

She spoke with the boundless pride of the daughter of Henri Quatre, of one whose father, brother, and husband were kings; she spoke also with the intolerance of a Papist for heretics, and with a woman's ignorance of the worth and value of the great movements and upheavals of the world.

All this Strafford saw; he saw also that she was a bad counsellor for the King, but, though he was not the kind of man to relish sharing confidences with a woman, he had long since recognized the fact that Henriette Marie ruled England fully as much as the King.

Therefore he answered quietly—

'It is the only expedient, Madame, to raise money.'

'I would rather,' returned the Queen impetuously, 'sell every jewel I possess!'

The Earl smiled sadly.

'All your jewels twice over, Madame, would not serve our need now.'

The Queen turned and caught her husband's sleeve.

'Is there no alternative—none?' she demanded. 'Where are the soldiers? Believe me, I would sooner see the heads of these men on London Bridge than conferring together in Westminster Hall.'

'Nay,' replied Charles tenderly, 'hold up thy heart, dearest. I cannot think I shall again be confronted by such unruly miscreants as last time, and truly there are divers things of much inconvenience that I do fear cannot be settled save by this same calling of a Parliament.'

The Queen returned his look of deep affection with a flashing glance.

'Truly I am ashamed and scandalized that Your Majesty is come to this pass! Where are your lords and your soldiers?'

'We have barely enough to hold the Scots off London.'

replied Charles, 'and those are unpaid and disaffected—as thou knowest.'

The Queen's great eyes sparkled with the ready tears of provoked passion.

'My Lord Archbishop was not safe at Lambeth,' said Strafford slowly. 'The mobile followed him even to the gates of Whitehall.'

'And is there no one to fire on them—to cut them down with the sword?' asked the Queen. 'Oh, Strafford, my Lord Strafford, I fear you have very greatly failed of your high promises!'

'The depth of my failure is measured by the depth of my humiliation,' returned the Earl. 'I have not spared myself, Madame, in the endeavour to make this kingdom great in the councils of Europe, and His Majesty first among the crowned heads thereof, but the breath of the populace is a wind that will blow any barque on to the rocks.'

The King put his hand on Strafford's great shoulder.

'My friend,' he said warmly, 'no king ever had a truer. Do not blame my lord, Mary, for this pass we are in, for he, if any man can, will serve us and help us to a better issue.'

'In France we have other ways to deal with treason and rebellion,' said the Queen with sudden weariness; 'but do what thou wilt! Call thy Parliament, and God grant it avail thee to ease thy needs!'

She moved, with a whisper of silk, from the two men, and, taking up a vellum-bound book from the little bureau where the King had sat, fluttered over the painted leaves.

Strafford picked up his great plumed hat; he was bound that evening for the headquarters of the English army at York, where he was to take up the chief command.

The King walked with him to the door, holding his arm.

'Fear thou nought,' he said earnestly. 'I will protect thee.'

The Queen put down the book and came forward.

'Take no heed of my passions,' she said sweetly. 'You have served us well and we love you; good fortune, my lord. Farewell, and a fair journey to York.'

The Earl went on one knee to kiss her perfumed, pale

hand, and she looked at him with a certain tenderness, a certain regret, a certain scorn curious to behold.

'I am too much your servant to avow myself afresh your creature,' said Strafford, lifting his ardent eyes, not to the lady, but to his master. 'You have all of me. I pray God deliver Your Majesty from these present pressures, and grant me power to work you some service.'

The sun was pouring broad beams full through the window and illumining all the rich treasures that filled the cabinet, the gold-threaded tapestry, the Italian pictures, the finely-wrought furniture, the carpets of Persia, and the two graceful figures so delicately apt to this gorgeous setting. The sunlight fell also on my lord, a figure more soldierlike and not so attuned to a scene of luxury.

So he took his leave and came glooming into the courtyard, and mounted amid his escort, and rode down Whitehall.

The streets were empty, by reason of the heat ; only the vendors of oranges and a few idlers were abroad, but when my lord reached Westminster Hall, he saw by the corner-posts of the road two men standing, and his bright, quick glance knew them at once for the two enemies of his—one his chief enemy, Mr. Pym, and the other one of his followers who had sat for Cambridge in the Little Parliament, and been marked unfavourably by my lord—a certain Oliver Cromwell.

My lord was too great a man to be discourteous, he touched his beaver to the gentlemen and rode on with his guard, serene and aloof.

John Pym looked after the little cavalcade flashing in the dust and sunlight.

'There goeth the chief enemy of these realms,' he said. 'Marked you his haughty eye when he did salute us ?'

'He cometh from Whitehall,' returned Mr. Cromwell. 'Hath he advised the King to call a Parliament, think you, Mr. Pym ?'

John Pym pointed to Westminster Hall behind them.

'There you and I will sit before the summer be burnt out,' he answered, 'whether the King issue the writs or no.'

They both stood silent, looking after my lord, who pre-

sently turned in his saddle and gazed back at the Parliament House.

'*My head or thy head,*' he thought, as he rode through the sunlight.

Strafford did not want to die.

CHAPTER III

MR. PYM AND AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

WHEN Mr. Cromwell had seen Lord Strafford ride away into the late summer dust of gold, he returned to his lodging and, packing up his effects, went back to Huntingdon. He was lately removed from St. Ives to Ely, and was become of late a more quiet, sombre man than even formerly, for he had received a blow his soul had staggered under, namely, the death of his eldest son, a gallant youth still at college. Yet he was soon withdrawn again from his grazing grounds and his cattle, his harvesting, and buying, and selling, for the King called a Parliament, and the people sent up from the boroughs and shires all the flower of English gentleness, the Cursons, Ashtons, Leighs, Derings, Ingrams, Fairfaxes, Cecils, Polles, Grenvils, Trevors, Carews, and Edgcombes, all fine old names deep rooted in English soil—most of them the very men who had formed the late Parliament which the King had so summarily dismissed—and with them came Mr. Cromwell, borough member for Cambridge, a silent man still, waiting for the Divine guidance which had been promised him when he entered into Covenant with the Lord.

Soon after the session opened, a motion was moved for inquiry into Irish affairs, and Mr. Cromwell, seeing Mr. Pym as they left the House together, called out to him and said—

'It is my Lord Strafford you strike at, is it not?'

And Mr. Pym answered 'Yes.'

The two gentlemen walked together down Whitehall. There were a great many of the meaner sort abroad, hustling and clamouring and passing rumour from mouth to mouth about the progress of the Scots and the humour

of the King, all of them big with hopes of the things the Parliament men would do, now they were gotten together ; of how the bishops would be put down for ever, the new taxes taken off, and His Majesty's design for bringing over an army of Irish or French Papists finally defeated.

As they neared Whitehall—that portentous and haughty palace behind whose closed gates Majesty endured humiliation as best might be—Mr. Pym, looking round him in his stately way at the robust and eager crowd, touched his companion's arm.

'Mr. Cromwell,' he said, 'there is good material here if the right man could be found to handle it.'

'Tis a great nation,' answered Mr. Cromwell, 'but 'tis to the ancient blood we must look—not to these.'

'That was my meaning,' returned John Pym ; 'there are among us many able men—but who will be called ?'

'Thou thyself, Mr. Pym,' said his friend warmly, 'art surely a man after God's own heart, one whom He hath raised up to be a captain, even as He raised up David.'

'I do what I can,' returned Mr. Pym quietly, 'but I am not the man for whom England waiteth.'

By now they had reached the post office at Charing Cross and halted at a cutler's shop near by, for Mr. Cromwell had left his sword there in the morning to be repaired, and now came to call for it. As there was press enough of people buying and testing arms about the door, they were delayed a little, and as they waited, a young gentleman, thrusting a brace of new pistols into his belt, pushed his way through the crowd, mounted a horse a groom held for him, and rode away with great speed.

Mr. Pym looked after him.

'That is a friend of my Lord Strafford,' he whispered, 'posting to York to warn him to keep from London.'

'Has it come to that ?' asked Mr. Cromwell in a moved voice. 'Is my lord afraid ?'

John Pym looked at him sharply.

'Hast thou not seen that temper in the House whereof any man might be afraid ?' he answered.

'But my Lord Strafford !' exclaimed the other gentleman in a tone as if he named the King himself.

'Thinkest thou I have not the courage to impeach my

Lord Strafford?' demanded Mr. Pym grimly. 'He is the chief author of these troubles, and must answer for them to the Commons of England.'

'I well believe thou hast the courage,' answered Mr. Cromwell quietly, taking up the sword which was waiting for him, 'as I believe my lord hath the courage to answer you.'

'He hath courage,' returned John Pym. 'You speak as if you favoured him,' he added with a smile.

Mr. Cromwell smiled also and they left the shop, turning towards St. Martin's Lane where Mr. Cromwell had his lodgings beyond the fields, and there, when they had reached his chamber, they sat quiet awhile, oppressed by the sense of great events which, gathering force and momentum with every day, were marching forward with the majestic strength of fate—events in which they, these two modest gentlemen sitting silent in this modest chamber, felt that they might be involved, might indeed be piece and part of the new pattern into which the destinies of England were being rapidly woven.

Presently Mr. Cromwell rose and opened the window on to the light of the setting sun which fell aslant the narrow street.

'There is a great battle before us,' he said.

'Now the Parliament is called, half the battle is won,' replied Mr. Pym.

'Dost thou see things so easily?' returned the other. 'This Earl now will make a fight.'

'This Earl will bend,' flashed John Pym, 'as the King will bend.'

'The King?' repeated Mr. Cromwell thoughtfully. 'Wilt thou threaten even the rock of Divine authority on which the throne standeth?'

John Pym laid his hand on his friend's arm with a great eagerness and intensity of gesture. He stood now in the full light of the open window, and it was noticeable that, despite his strong and passionate air, his person was emaciated and there was a look of disease and fatigue very marked in his mobile face, as if he felt the full weight of his years.

'Hark ye, Mr. Cromwell,' he said, 'thou art now much

hearkened to in the House and do often obtain the mastery thereof ; thou wilt come to great things yet, for, methinks, thou hast power over men ; help us now to rid England of this Strafford. I ask thee, for hitherto thou hast kept silence on this matter. And I do not know thy mind on it.'

Mr. Cromwell regarded him gravely, almost mournfully.

'Dost thou mean to have the Earl's head ?' he asked.

'That is my inner and final meaning—even as it is his to have thine and mine, and that of every man in England who dares speak his mind.'

'Then there is failure before thee,' answered Oliver Cromwell, 'for this man is the King's friend, and the King will protect him.'

'The King will have neither the power nor the will to protect a man whom the Commons demand.'

'The Duke of Buckingham——'

Mr. Pym broke the sentence.

'Ay—the Duke of Buckingham—would the King have saved him ? Felton's knife spared the answer.'

'This makes His Majesty without honour,' said Mr. Cromwell. 'I cannot imagine that he ever could or would abandon one whom he hath twined so closely in his affections.'

'The Earl must go and all he standeth for,' returned John Pym.

'Ay, all he standeth for—the Star Chamber, the ship-money, the Court of High Commission, the power of the bishops—but the man thou canst not touch, and thou mayst well leave his life when thou hast destroyed his life work.'

'Surely thou art always too compassionate,' replied Mr. Pym.

'I have no natural hatred against the Earl of Strafford,' smiled Mr. Cromwell, 'and it seemeth to me a hopeless task you do attempt, for the King can never surrender him.'

'I may fail,' said John Pym. 'I know that I play a desperate game, but I feel the Lord is with me and that for His ends and His people I work. Only a little while we have, the bravest and best of us, and how much there is to do ! How much !'

Mr. Cromwell leant further out of the window ; there

was a pot of geranium slips on the sill, and their perfume was strengthening with the fall of evening, and filling the quiet air with richness.

Oliver Cromwell looked over the deep, bright, green leaves towards Whitehall which lay bathed in the gold and amber light of the sinking sun.

‘Hark!’ he said, ‘hark!’

‘Thou hast sharp ears,’ said Mr. Pym. ‘I hear nothing.’

‘I hear,’ returned the other, ‘the citizens of London rising——’

John Pym listened intently. A distant, murmurous sound was soon audible enough, a hoarse sound of human shouting, a blend of human voices with clash of weapons and the tramp of feet.

‘’Tis the train-bands fighting the apprentices, and those of the baser sort, belike,’ said Mr. Pym. ‘Yesterday they were like to have burnt down Lambeth Palace when they discovered His Grace had again fled.’

Mr. Cromwell continued to gaze towards the end of the street, across which several people were beginning to run, attracted by the now common event of a street riot.

‘The Lord is leading the nation through bitter ways,’ he observed. ‘And I do see ahead of us a time of much trouble, for if His Majesty is stubborn, these,’ he pointed down the street to the hurrying crowds, ‘will fight.’

‘Parliament,’ replied Mr. Pym, ‘will settle all grievances without bringing the mobile into it. Mr. Cromwell, to-morrow I will go to the Bar of the House of Lords and impeach the King’s favourite of high treason, and there will be a many following me. Wilt thou be one of them?’

Oliver Cromwell turned swiftly round to face his friend.

‘Count on me,’ he said quietly, ‘to not leave thy party until thou hast brought the King to reason, but I believe that this will be a longer and bloodier business than any of us reckon on as yet.’

‘I trust we shall leave blood out of it,’ answered Mr. Pym gravely. ‘But God directs as He will, and we are not of a temper to shrink from fighting for His word and our liberty.’

By now the crowd had gathered in considerable pro-

portions, and the two spectators at the window observed that the centre of this agitated throng was a coach and four which, protected by several constables, footmen, and two gentlemen on horseback, was endeavouring to make headway down Whitehall, probably to the palace.

'Who is this,' wondered Mr. Pym, 'whose appearance causeth such a riot?'

They were, however, too far off to discern the occupant of the coach, and therefore presently descended into the street to discover who it might be whose progress was thus impeded, and to offer, if need be, some assistance against the clamour of the mobile, for violence and outrage were not wished for by these two, even though the cries of the populace might be but an echo of their own sentiments.

As they began to push their way into the fringe of the crowd, they perceived that the coach had been brought to a standstill and was densely surrounded by shop boys and the meaner kind of citizen.

The coachman, buffeted by various missiles, leant from his box and cried—

'My lady, I cannot go on!'

At this the leathern curtains of the coach were drawn back and a woman's face appeared at the window. She regarded the press before her fixedly, and with a curious blankness of expression, her high-bred and sensitive countenance had a cold look of either pride or terror, or pre-occupation, which made it mask-like as a carving.

Mr. Pym touched his companion's arm.

'It is Lady Strafford,' he said.

Mr. Cromwell had never before seen the wife of the great minister who was now no better than a doomed man, and he gazed with vast interest and pity at the face staring from the coach window.

'We should save her from this,' he answered, and, lifting his sword hilt, with a few rude blows he forced his way through the crowd to the coach.

'Stop this fooling!' he shouted, and his voice, when raised, was of an extraordinary depth and harshness. The rioters turned, startled, and, with a quick movement of his powerful arm, he swept two youths from the wheels

to which they were clinging to impede the movement of the coach.

Mr. Pym was now beside him, rather breathless with pushing his way through.

The Countess never moved or altered her bitter calm ; the two gentlemen both saluted her, and when Mr. Pym's hat was off and she had a clear view of his countenance, she gave a great start and the hot blood rushed to her face and burnt up her pallor.

'Mr. Pym !' she cried. 'Oh, John Pym !'

At the sound of this name, which was now famous throughout England as the champion of the people, the crowd quieted and began shamefacedly to give way, being at heart good humoured and not disposed to more than rough horse-play, after the nature of English crowds.

'Ride on, madam,' said Mr. Pym sombrely. 'Your way is clear.'

'I want not your succour,' she returned, with great heat and force ; 'false friend and subtle enemy, I know what you contrive against us !'

'Against *you* nothing,' he replied, 'since once I enjoyed your grace and entertainment—and, madam, it was your lord left us, not we him.'

'Oh, what a land is this become !' answered the Countess, 'when every designing, rebellious knave may endeavour to strike even at the very architects of the realm !'

'Architects of tyranny, madam,' said Mr. Pym ; 'and every plain fellow who can handle a sword may rightly endeavour to strike at them.'

'Your presence flouts me,' cried Lady Strafford. 'Drive on !'

The coach swung forward on the leathers and jolted off down Whitehall, still pursued by a few boys shouting and hooting.

'In the old days when I knew her,' said John Pym, 'she was a most modest, excellent lady, but now I doubt but that she is proud and blinded even as her lord.'

'She seemed to me,' replied Mr. Cromwell, 'to be not so much as one proud, but as one in a mortal fear.'

'She has heard somewhat of this inquiry into Irish

affairs, and is off to the King to pray protection for her lord. Poor, silly woman, as if she could prevail against the Commons of England ! ’

The autumn dusk was now rapidly approaching, and the two friends turned into the Strand to find a tavern to get themselves some dinner before they returned to the House.

Meanwhile the Countess of Strafford drove furiously into the courtyard of the palace and, hastening through the public halls and galleries, demanded an audience of the Queen.

CHAPTER IV

THE QUEEN'S POLICY

LADY STRAFFORD was admitted, without any delay, into the private apartment of the Queen, where Henriette Marie sat with two ladies in a sumptuous simplicity and elegant seclusion, which was noticeable in the extreme richness and good taste of the apartment, in the attire of the Queen herself, which, free from all fopperies of fashion, was of an exceeding fineness and grace, and in her occupation, which was that of sewing figures in beads on a casket of white silk.

At the entrance of the Countess, she very sweetly dismissed the ladies and smiled at her visitor, then continued her task, thoughtfully selecting the beads from an ivory tray and sewing them skilfully on to the thick white silk.

The Countess remained standing before the Queen. She was now shown to be a woman of a carriage of pride and fire, fair-haired, and swift-moving, with a great expression of energy which did not alter her wholly feminine attraction.

‘ Your Majesty will forgive this uncourtly coming of mine,’ she said, ‘ but I have it on good authority that this inquiry into Irish Affairs is but a covert attack on my Lord Strafford.’

‘ Yea, most certainly,’ returned the Queen, raising her soft eyes to the breathless lady.

‘ I saw John Pym to-day,’ cried the Countess, ‘ and methought he had an air of triumph ; besides, would the

very boys in the street dare shout at me unless my lord's fall were assured ? '

She twisted her hands together and sank on to a brocade stool near the window. The Queen slightly lifted her shoulders and smiled. She bitterly detested the English who in their turn loathed her, both for her nationality and her religion, and even for the name 'Mary,' which the King gave her, and which was for ever connected in the popular mind with Papistry and with two queens who had been enemies of England. Therefore she was well-used to unpopularity and that hatred of the crowd of which Lady Strafford to-day had had a first taste.

'Why discourage yourself about that, madam ? ' she asked. 'These creatures are not to be regarded.'

'The House of Commons is to be regarded,' returned Lady Strafford.

She spoke, despite herself, in a tone of respect for the power that threatened her husband, and the Frenchwoman's smile deepened.

'How afraid you all are of this Parliament,' she said.

'Has it not lately shown that it is something to be afraid of ? ' cried the Countess.

The Queen continued to carefully select the tiny glass beads and to carefully thread them on the long white silk thread. To the Countess, who had never loved her, this absorption, at such an hour, in an occupation so trivial, was exasperating.

'I have come to Your Majesty on matter of serious moment,' she said, and she spoke as one who had a claim ; her husband had rendered great services to the Crown, and held his lofty position more by his own genius than by the King's favour. 'Yesterday I sent an express to York, beseeching my lord to stay there with the army, and to-day Mr. Holles, one of my kinsmen, hath gone on the same errand. I beseech Your Majesty to add your weight to these entreaties of mine, and to ask His Majesty to bid my lord stay where he is safe.'

At this the Queen's lovely right hand stopped work, and lay slack on the white cover of the casket, and with the other she put back the fine ringlets of black hair from her brow and looked full and delicately at the Countess.

'Both the King and I,' she returned gently, 'wrote to my lord before that—ay, the day before, and were you more often at court, madame, you would have heard of it.'

An eloquent flush bespoke the relief and gratitude of the Countess.

'Then he is safe!' she exclaimed. 'At York, amid the army, who can touch him!'

The Queen laughed lightly.

'Dear lady,' she said, 'thy lord is no longer at York, but on his way to London. At least, if he be as loyal as I think he be.'

'London?' repeated Lady Strafford, as if it were a word of terror. 'London? my lord cometh?'

'On the bidding of His Majesty and myself,' answered Henriette Marie.

The Countess rose, she pushed back the dull crimson hood from her fair curls, and looked the Queen straightly in the face.

'Wherefore have you bidden him to London, madame?' she asked.

'That he may answer the charges that will be brought against him,' said the Queen.

'And you have persuaded him to this!' cried the Countess. 'I did think that I might have counted you and His Majesty among my lord's friends!'

Henriette Marie picked up a knot of white silk and began to disentangle the twisted strands.

'The Earl hath His Majesty's assurances and mine, of friendship and protection,' she said with dignity touched with coldness.

Lady Strafford stood silent, utterly dismayed and bewildered. It seemed to her incredible that the King should have asked his hated minister to come to the capital at the moment when the popular fury against him had reached full height and the Commons were on the eve of impeaching him. She did not, could not, doubt that the King would wish to protect his favourite, but she felt an awful doubt as to his power. Had he not been forced to call the Parliament at the demand of the people?—was it not to please them that he had sent for the Earl?

—so what else might he not consent to when driven into a corner !

The Countess shuddered ; she thought of the angry crowd who had chased Laud from Lambeth Palace, who daily hooted at and insulted her when she went abroad, of the useless train-bands, of the general bottomless confusion and tumult, and she saw before her with a horrid vividness, the calm, weary face of John Pym, the man who led the Commons.

The Queen surveyed her narrowly, and observed the doubt and terror in her face.

‘ Are you afraid ? ’ she asked. ‘ Is it possible you think the King cannot protect his friends ? ’

Lady Strafford looked at the beautiful frail woman in her lace and silk who was so delicate, so charming, so gay, and who had more power over the King than his own conscience, and her heart gave a sick swerve. She never had, never could, wholly trust the French Papist Queen, for she was herself too wholly open and English in her nature.

Henriette Marie rose, and the jasmine perfume was stirred by the shaking of her garments.

‘ Is it not better,’ she said, with a lovely, tender smile, ‘ that Lord Strafford should come here and face his enemies than that he should lurk in York among his soldiers as if he feared what creatures like this Pym could do ? ’

‘ Madame,’ returned Lady Strafford, through white lips, ‘ no one would ever think the Earl feared his enemies. But to come to London now is not courage but folly.’

‘ It is obedience to the King’s wishes,’ said the Queen, and a haughty fire sparkled in her dark liquid eyes.

‘ The King,’ returned the Countess, ‘ asketh too much from his servant, by Heaven, madame ! Those who love my lord would see him stay at York——’

‘ And those who love the King would obey him,’ flashed Henriette Marie.

The Countess controlled herself and swept a curtsy.

‘ I take my leave,’ she said. ‘ May Your Majesty hold as ever sacred the promises with which you have brought my lord in among those who madden to destroy him ! As for me, my heart is fallen low. Madame, a good night.’

'I do forgive thy boldness for the sake of thy anxiety,' said the Queen with sweetness. 'We women have many desperate moments in these bitter times. A good night, my lady.'

The Countess bent her proud blonde head and departed, and the Queen took up her beads and her silks and began again to work the bouquet of roses, lilies, and violets she was embroidering on the lid of the casket.

A thoughtful and haughty expression clouded the delicate lines of her face, and this proud pensive look did not alter when the hangings that had scarcely fallen into place behind Lady Strafford were again lifted, and the King, unattended, and with an air of haste, came into her presence.

'Has Strafford come?' she asked.

'Not yet!' replied Charles, in an unsteady voice, 'and I have begun to wish I had not sent for him.'

The Queen flung down her work and rose; the angry red of a deep passion stained her pallor.

'Canst thou never be resolute?' she cried. 'Wilt thou for ever hesitate and change and regret every action? My lord, I would sooner be dead than see this temper in thee.'

The King came and kissed her hand with a charming air of gallantry.

'Sweet,' he said, in self-justification, 'it is a horrid thing to command a man into the hands of his enemies.'

'Thou knowest,' returned Henriette Marie firmly, 'that the Parliament and London both clamour for my lord and will not, by any means, be quiet until he appear. Thou knowest that we, that I, am in actual danger.'

'Hush, dear heart—speak not of our danger,' interrupted Charles hastily, 'lest it seemeth we sacrifice our servant, our friend, to bare fear.'

'Acquit thyself to thy conscience, Charles,' she answered with limitless pride. 'Art thou not the King? Must I remind thee of that as even now I had to remind my Lady Strafford?'

'My lady here?' murmured the King.

'Did you not meet her in your coming?'

As she spoke Henriette Marie moved towards a mirror

that hung in one corner, and looked at her reflection with unseeing eyes, then turned the same abstracted glance on to the King.

The mirror was set in a deep border of embroidery which was framed in tortoise-shell, and the mellow colours of these, silks and shell, were softened into rosy dimness by the shaded light. This same glow was over the lovely figure of the Queen, her gown of ivory and amber tints, brightened into a knot of orange at her breast, and the pearls round her throat, and her soft, dark hair held no more lustre than the exquisite carnation of her fragile beauty. She seemed utterly removed from all that was commonplace, tumultuous, noisy, coarse, and Charles, gazing at her with his soul in his eyes, was spurred and stung, as always when he regarded his wife, with bitter anger that he was not allowed to follow the bright guidance of this lady, and live with her in rich happiness and peace adorned with every fine and costly art, with all the intellectual delicacies and luxurious refinements which so pleased them both.

He loathed the English people who dragged him and even his adored wife into the clamorous atmosphere of intrigue and dissension, of controversy and riot.

To Charles there was one God, one Church, one King, one right—the right of God as manifested in the King's right; all else was to him mere vexation, disloyalty, and blasphemy. The popular side of the questions now rending the nations he did not even consider; he stood absolutely, without compromise or doubt, by his own simple, unyielding, ardent belief that he was King by God's will, and above and beyond all laws.

And his late impotency to enforce this view on his subjects had stirred his naturally gracious serene nature to deepest astonishment and anger. He was baffled, outraged, and inwardly humiliated, and he had already in his heart decided to be avenged on these gentlemen of the Commons whose clamours had so rudely broken his regal security, and on the stubborn English who had taken advantage of the rebellion of the Scots and his lack of money with which to defend himself, to force on him this hateful Parliament.

And now, when he knew that Pym, the inspiration and leader of these unruly gentlemen, was daring to strike at his own special friend—minister and favourite, the man who was at once his guide and mouthpiece—he was bewildered by his intense inner fury, and pride as well as justice made him regret that he had summoned the Earl to London.

He gazed at the Queen where she stood in golden shadow, and these thoughts tormented him bitterly.

He knew her mind ; her temper was even more despotic than his, and armed force was the first and only weapon she would have ever used in dealing with the people ; her counsels were ever for the high hand, the haughty command, the merciless sword, and always the King hearkened to her. But his nature was more subtle, involved, and secretive than hers, and he knew better than she did the growing strength of the forces opposed to him ; therefore he had often endeavoured to cope with his difficulties after a fashion she called irresolute and unstable.

The Queen broke the heavy silence.

‘Strafford will come and we will protect him,’ she said ; ‘that is enough.’

‘Nay, not enough,’ replied Charles, ‘for I must be avenged on these men who seek to touch my lord.’

‘Hadst thou hearkened to me,’ she murmured in a melancholy voice, ‘thou hadst been avenged on all these long since.’

‘Ay, Mary,’ cried the King earnestly, ‘we are not in a realm as loyal and steadfast as France, but rule a country that hath become a very hive of sedition, discontent, and treason, and it is well to tread cautiously.’

‘Caution is not a kingly virtue,’ said Henriette Marie, with that same sad sweetness of demeanour that was so exquisite a cloak for reproof.

‘Trust me to act as is best for thee and for our sons,’ replied Charles firmly. ‘Trust me to so acquit myself to God as to be worthy of thy love.’

The Queen regarded him with a wise little smile, then pulled a toy watch of diamonds from the lace at her bosom and glanced at it with eyes that flashed a little.

'With quick riding and sharp relays, my lord might almost be here,' she remarked.

Charles sank into the great chair with arms by the window, and bent his gaze on the floor. His whole figure had a drooping and fatigued look; he mechanically fingered the deep points of lace edging his cambric cuffs.

Henriette Marie dropped the watch back behind the knot of orange velvet on her breast, and her glance, that was so quick and keen behind the misty softness that veiled it, travelled rapidly over her husband's person.

She noted the grey hairs in his love-locks, the lines of anxiety across his brow and round his mouth, his unnatural pallor, the nervous twitching of his lips. He was the dearest thing on earth to her, but she had been married to him nearly twenty years and she knew his weakness, his faults, too well to any longer regard him as that Prince of romance which he had at first appeared to her. His figure, as she looked at him now, seemed to her strangely tragical; she could have wept for this man who leant on her when she should have leant on him, this man whom she would have despised if she had not loved.

'Holy Virgin,' she said passionately to herself, 'give him strength and me courage.'

She went to her table and began to put away her work. The King raised his narrowed wistful eyes and said abruptly—

'Supposing the Earl doth not come? We are as likely to be hounded from Whitehall as His Grace from Lambeth if my lord disappoints the people.'

'He will come,' said Henriette Marie, delicately putting away her beads and silks in a tortoise-shell box lined with blue satin and redolent of English lavender.

Even as she spoke and before she had turned the silver key in the casket, her page had entered with the momentous news for which they both, in their different fashion, waited.

My Lord Strafford was in the audience chamber, all in a reek from hard riding.

They went down together, the King and Queen, and found the dark Earl, in boots and cloak still muddied, waiting for them.

'My faithful one!' cried Charles, 'so thou art come!' and when Strafford would have knelt, he prevented him, and instead kissed him on the cheek.

'Sire,' answered my lord, 'I met your messengers on the road. I had already left York and was hastening to London to meet this accusation mine enemies do prepare to spring on me.'

Charles seized his hand and grasped it warmly.

'I do approve thine action, and here confirm all expressions of favour I have ever given thee.'

'Thy lady,' added the Queen, smiling, 'was, poor soul, fearful for thee, but thou art not, I think, seeing thou hast our protection and friendship.'

'Madame,' answered the Earl, fixing on her the powerful glance of his tired dark eyes, 'I am fearful of nothing, I do thank my God, save only of some smirch on my honour, and that is surely safe while my gracious master holdeth me by the hand.'

There was energy and purpose in his look, his carriage, his speech, his bearing had the unshakable composure of the fine man finely prepared for any fate.

'Sire,' he said, speaking with great sincerity and emotion, 'my own aim hath been to make thee and England great, and if His Majesty is satisfied, I hold myself acquitted of any wrong to any man, nor do I take any such on my conscience.'

The King, much moved, clasped my lord's firm right hand closer in his own, and stood close beside him in intimate affection.

'What weapon hast thou prepared to fight these rascals with?' asked Henriette Marie.

'Madame,' replied the Earl grimly, 'I shall go down to the House to-morrow and impeach John Pym of high treason on the ground of his sympathy with, and negotiating with, the rebel Scots.' He smiled fiercely as if to himself, and added, '*My head or thine*, and no time to lose!'

A sudden tremor shook the Queen, a silence fell on her vivacity.

'Come to us to-morrow,' said Charles, 'before going to Westminster—and now to thy waiting wife and a good night, dear lord.'

'Truly this evening I am a weary man,' smiled Strafford, and with that kissed the hands of his lieges and left them.

They stood silent after his going, not looking at each other.

They could hear the distant angry clamour of London at their gates.

CHAPTER V

THE FALL OF THE GREAT MINISTER

THE moon's circle was half-filled with light, a mist rose and hung above the river, a sullen rain was falling through the windless air, as the gentlemen left the House and dispersed among the excited crowd to their dwellings. Along the river the people were dense, they surged and gathered along the banks from Westminster to St. Katherine's wharf, shouting, singing, flinging up their hats, and wringing each other's hands for joy.

They had just been regaled with a sight many of them had never dared to hope to see. The mist and the rain had not obscured from their hungry eyes the barge in which my Lord Strafford, that morning the greatest subject in two kingdoms, had gone by, a prisoner, to the Tower.

He stood for an absolute monarchy, a dominant priesthood, taxation without law, the Star Chamber, the Court of High Commission, even as the Queen stood for Papistry and the possible employment of foreign force, and the two between them represented all that was most hateful to the English.

Therefore it was neither the usual levity of crowds nor the usual vulgar rejoicing in fallen greatness that animated these dense throngs of Londoners, but a deep, almost awful sense that a definite and tremendous struggle had begun between King and people, and had begun with a great victory on the popular side.

It had been a day of smouldering excitement that frequently burst into riotings between Westminster and Whitehall. In the morning my lord, with a guard of halberdiers, had gone down as usual to the House; after a little while he had returned to the palace, accompanied

each time by the furious shouting and groans of the people. The truth was that his charges against Pym were not yet ready, and he wished to consult his master.

The crowd, however, waited, fed by rumours that came from time to time by means of those who had the entry into the House; by the afternoon it was definitely known that Mr. Pym had cleared the Lobby and locked the door of the House, while a discussion of grave importance took place.

So the people waited, patient but insistent, trusting Mr. Pym and those gentlemen shut up with him, yet watchful lest they should cheat them.

Nor were they disappointed; at five o'clock out came Mr. Pym at the head of some three hundred Members, and, passing through the frantically applauding crowd, went to the House of Lords.

Here, at the Bar, he told the Peers, that by the command of the Commons in Parliament and in the name of all the Commons of England, he accused the Earl of Strafford of high treason, and demanded that he be put in custody while they produced the grounds of their accusation.

Then came my lord again, hastening back from Whitehall (where the news had reached him), with an assured and proud demeanour, and so into the House, with a gloomy and unseeing countenance for the hostile throng; then more suspense, while excitement increased to a point where it could not be any longer contained, and vented itself in fierce rattlings on the very doorsteps of Westminster Hall and rebellious tumults at the very gates of Whitehall, where the guards were doubled and stood with drawn swords, for there had been some ugly shouting of the Queen's name, and some hoarse demand that John Pym should accuse her also of high treason against the realm of England, and haul her forth with her black Papist brood of priests to answer the charges against her, even as my lord was answering, or must answer them. Before the misty evening was far advanced, and while the moon hung yet sickly pale in a scarcely dark sky, the prologue to this tragedy was accomplished, and my lord left the House where he had so long ruled supreme, and was conveyed down the sullen tide to the Tower.

And when he had at last gone, and his guarded barge was absorbed into the shadows of the Traitor's Gate, a kind of awe and silence fell over London. The great minister, the King's favourite, the man who was both his master's brain and conscience, had fallen so swiftly, so irrecoverably, as London knew in her heart, that there was almost a terror mingled with the triumph; for all knew that Strafford was not one like Somerset or Buckingham, but a man of the utmost capacity for courage, intelligence, and all the arts of government.

The Commons of Parliament, who had done this thing, scattered, weary and quiet, to their various homes and lodgings, and Mr. Cromwell and Mr. Hampden walked through the falling rain, communing with their hearts.

As they neared the palace which stood brilliant with flambeaux lights flashing on the drawn swords at the gates, Mr. Hampden turned his gentle face towards his companion and said, 'What will the King do?'

'The King?' repeated Mr. Cromwell, lifting earnest eyes to the silent palace. 'I would I could come face to face with the King—surely he is a man who might be persuaded of the truth of things if he were not so surrounded by frivolous, wrong, and wanton counsellors.'

'I believe,' answered John Hampden, 'that His Majesty rooteth his pretences so firmly in Divine Right—(being besides upheld in this by all the clergy), that he would consider it blasphemy to abate one jot of his claims. See this pass we are come to, Mr. Cromwell; we deal with a man with whom no compromise is possible—ask Mr. Pym, who tried to serve him—he will excuse himself, he will shift and turn, but he will never give way, and when he is most quiet he will always break his tranquillity with some monstrous imprudence, as this late forcing of the Archbishop's prayer book on the Scots, thereby provoking a peaceable nation into rebellion.'

Mr. Cromwell turned up the collar of his cloak, for the cold dampness of the night was increasing, and he was liable to rheumatism. He made no answer, and Mr. Hampden, glancing expectantly at his thoughtful face, repeated his query—

'What will the King do now?'

'What can he do?' replied the Member for Cambridge. 'Strafford falleth through serving him, and likely enough came to London on promise of the King's protection. The King will stand by Strafford.'

'Then it will remain to be seen which is the stronger—Parliament or His Majesty,' said John Hampden, and he sighed as if he foresaw ahead a long and bitter struggle. 'I tell thee this,' he added, with an earnestness almost sad, 'that if the people are disappointed of justice on my lord, the King is not safe in his own capital, nor yet the Queen. Thou hast observed, Mr. Cromwell, how well hated the Queen is?'

'A Papist and a Frenchwoman,' replied the other, 'how could she hope for English loyalty? And she is meddling—of all things the English hate a meddling woman. Her ways might do well in France, but here we like them not. I am sorry for my Lady Strafford,' he added irrelevantly, and with a strange note of tenderness in his rough voice. 'What are all these issues to her? Yet she must suffer for them. I saw her yesterday, and she was as still for terror as a chased deer fallen spent of breath, and yet had the courage to move and speak with pride, poor gentlewoman!'

'We shall see many piteous things before England be tranquil,' returned Mr. Hampden sadly. 'Chief among them this discomfiture of patient women. The Lord support them.'

They were now at Mr. Cromwell's door.

'Wilt thou come up, my cousin?' he asked, laying a detaining hand on the other's damp coat sleeve.

'This evening hold me excused,' answered Mr. Hampden. 'I have some country gentlemen at my entertainment, and I would not disappoint them.'

So they parted as quietly as if this momentous day had held nothing of note, and Mr. Cromwell went up to his modest chamber and lit the candles and placed them on a writing-table which held a Bible among the quills and papers. He stood for a while thoughtfully; he had flung off his mantle and his hat, and his well-made, strong figure showed erect in a plain, rather ill-cut, suit of dark green cloth, his band and cuffs were of linen, and there was no single ornament nor an inch of lace about his whole attire;

indeed, his lack of the ordinary elegancies of a gentleman's costume would have seemed to some an affectation, and to all a sure indication that he had now definitely joined the increasingly powerful Puritan party which had set itself to destroy every vestige of ornament in England—from Bishops to lace handkerchiefs, as their opponents sneeringly remarked. These enemies were not, perhaps, in a humour for sneering to-night when the chief of them lay straightened between prison walls. So thought Mr. Cromwell as he stood thoughtfully before the little table that bore the Bible, and looked down on the closed covers.

Above the table hung a mirror ; the glass was old and cracked, and into the frame were stuck various papers which showed how the present possessor of the room disregarded the original use of the mirror. Sufficient of the glass, however, remained unobscured to reflect the head and shoulders of Oliver Cromwell, and this reflection, with the dark background and the blurred surface of the glass, was like a fine portrait, and by reason of the absolute consciousness of the man, like a portrait of his soul as well as of his features.

His expression was at once fierce and tender and deeply thoughtful ; the brow, so carelessly shaded by the disordered brown hair, was free from any lines, the grey eyes seemed as if they looked curiously into the future, the lips were lightly set together, and seemed as if they might at any minute quiver into speech, the line of his jaw and cheek had a look of serene fierceness, like the noble idea of strength given by the jaw of a lion.

So he looked, reflected in the old mirror and lit by the two common candles, and if one had suddenly glanced over his shoulder into the glass and seen that face, they would have thought they looked at a painting of abstract qualities, not at a compound human being, at this moment so utterly was his rugged look of strength and fortitude spiritualized by the radiance of the soul within.

Outside the rain fell and there was no sound but the drip of the drops on the sill ; the great city was silent after the tumult of the day, most people were eating, sleeping, going their ways as if there was no King humiliated utterly, raging in his chamber ; no Queen weeping among

her priests ; no great man in prison writing to his wife : ' Hold up your heart, look to the children and your house, and at last, by God's good pleasure, we shall have our deliverance ' ; no quiet gentleman from Huntingdon standing in a quiet room and meditating things that would change this city and this land as it had not been changed since it bore the yoke of kingship.

To the many, even to Mr. Pym and Mr. Hampden, the fall of Strafford might seem a tremendous thing, a shrewd blow against tyranny and a daring act, but to this younger man, with his deeper, more mystical, religious fervour, his practical and immeasurable courage, the sweeping aside of the King's favourite was but the first of many acts that would utterly alter the face of England.

Strafford might have gone, but there were other things to go—Papistry, the Star Chamber, ship-money, and other civil wrongs, bishops, prayer books, church ornaments and choirs, and other pollutions of the pure faith of Christ, and there was a burning blazing ideal to be followed—the ideal of what might be made of England in moral worth, in civic liberty, in that domestic dignity and foreign power that had made the reign of Elizabeth Tudor splendid throughout the world.

This might be done ; but how was a poor country gentleman, untrained in diplomacy or war, to accomplish it ?

How dare he presume that he was meant to accomplish it ?

He moved from the table abruptly and, going to the window, rested his head against the frame and stared through the soiled panes into the dark street where the lights glimmered sparsely at long intervals in the heavy winter air.

He recalled and clung to the memory of the vision that he had had in the old barn outside St. Ives ; the certainty that he was in covenant with the Lord to do the Lord's work in England had pierced his soul with the same sharpness as a dagger might pierce the flesh. At times the remembered glamour faded, weariness, misgivings, would cloud the glorious conviction—yet deep-rooted in his noble spirit it remained. God had spoken to him and he was to do God's works,—but the practical humanity in him, the

strong English sense and sound judgment demanded—how?

He was of full middle age and unaccomplished in anything save farming and such knowledge of the law as less than a year's training could give him. His education had been the usual education of a gentleman, but he had less learning than most, for his college days had been short, owing to the death of his father and the sudden call to responsibilities, and he had absolutely no love for any of the arts and sciences. How then was he equipped to combat the immense powers arrayed against him—the King, the Church, immemorial tradition, custom, usage, the weight of aristocracy, the example of Europe—for his design, though yet vague, was to create in England a constitution for Church and State for which he could see no pattern anywhere within the world.

He felt no greatness in himself, he was even doubtful of his own capacity. Though he was already much hearkened to, principally, he thought, by reason of his connexion with Hampden and the vast number of relations he had in the House, still, on the few occasions when he had spoken in public, as when he had taken up the cause of the Fen people in the late question of the drainage scheme, his ardour and impetuosity had gone far to spoil his cause, and he was well behind, in political weight and party influence, such men as Pym and Hampden and even Falkland and Hyde, Holles and Haselrig, Culpeper and Strode.

Yet with trumpet rhythm there beat on his brain—
'Something to do and I to do it! Work to be done and I to accomplish it! Something to be gained and I to gain it! The Lord's battles to be fought and I to fight them!'

He moved from the window; the room was cold and the candles burnt with a tranquil frosty light. Mr. Cromwell went to the great book lying between the two plain brass sticks, the only book he ever read, the book in which, to him, was comprised the whole of life and all we know of the earth, of hell, of heaven.

He opened the Bible at random; the thick leaves fell back at the psalms, and his passionate grey eyes fell on a sentence that he read aloud with a deep note of triumph in his heavy masculine voice—

'O help us against the enemy; for vain is the help of man. Through God we shall do great acts: and it is he that shall tread down our enemies.'

'Through . . . God,' repeated Mr. Cromwell, 'we . . . shall do . . . *great acts.*'

He put his hand to the plain little sword at his side, that had hitherto been of no use save to give evidence of his gentility on market days at Huntingdon and Ely. . . . '*Great acts,*' he repeated again.

As he stood so, his right hand crossed to his sword, his left resting on the open Bible, his chin sunk on to his breast and his whole face softened and veiled with thought, he was not conscious of the humble room, the patter of the rain, the two coarse candles poorly dispelling the darkness. He was only aware of a sudden access of power, a revival of the burning sensation that had come to him in the old barn perfumed with hay at St. Ives.

His doubts and confusions, misgivings and fears, vanished, this inner conviction and power seemed sufficient to combat all the foes concealed in the quiet city—all, even to the King himself. . . .

He went to his knees as swiftly as if smitten into that attitude.

'Through God,' he whispered, 'we shall do *great acts.*' He hid his strong face in his strong hands and prayed.

CHAPTER VI

THE KING FAILS

NOVEMBER had turned to May and my Lord Strafford's public agony was over; he lay in the Tower a condemned man.

For seventeen days had he, in this most momentous trial of his, defended himself, unaided, against thirteen accusers who relieved each other, and with such skill that his impeachment was like to have miscarried; but the Commons were not so to be baulked.

They dare not let Strafford escape them; they feared an Irish army, a French army, they feared the desperate

King would dissolve them, they feared another gunpowder plot, and twice, on a cracking of the floor, fled their Chamber. All fears, all anxieties, all animosities were at their sharpest edge ; the crowds in the streets demanded the blood of Strafford, and did not pause to add that if they were disappointed they would not hesitate to satisfy themselves with more exalted victims.

A Bill of attainder against my lord was brought forward and hurried through Parliament. Pym and Hampden opposed it, but popular fear and popular rage were stronger than they, and there was no hope for Strafford save in the master whom he was condemned for serving. He wrote to the King, urging him to pass the Bill for the sake of England's peace.

London became more and more exasperated ; rumours flew thick : the King's son-in-law, the Prince of Orange, was coming with an army ; money was being sent from the French King ; the Irish, that ancient nightmare, were to be let loose ; the Queen had raised a troop to attack the Keys of the Kingdom and set my lord free by force from the Tower.

The Bill was passed, and on a May morning sent up for the King's assent.

He had, a week before, sent a message to the Lords, beseeching them not to press upon his conscience, on which he could not condemn his minister.

But the appeal had failed ; Lords, Commons, and people all waited eagerly, angrily, threateningly, for the King's assent.

He asked a day to consider ; he sent for three bishops and, in great agony of mind, asked their ghostly counsel. Usher and Juxon told him Strafford was innocent and that he should not sign. Williams bid him bow to the opinion of the judges, and bade him listen to the thunderous tumult at his gates. London was roused, he said, and would not be pacified until my lord's head fell on Tower Hill.

So the hideous day wore on to evening, and the King had not signed.

As the delay continued, the suspense and agitation in the city became almost unbearable, and it took all the efforts of the royal guards to hold the gates of the Palace.

The King was locked into his private cabinet, and even the Queen had not seen him since noon.

Henriette Marie had passed the earlier part of the day with her younger children. She had made several vain attempts to see the King and she had denied herself to all, even to Lady Strafford and her frantic supplications.

She had many agents continually employed, and during the day they came to her and reported upon the feeling in the Houses, in the city, and in the streets.

She saw, from these advices, that the King's situation was little better than desperate. She saw another thing—*there was not, at that moment, sufficient force available in the capital to control the multitude.* They were, in fact, at the mercy of the populace.

When the haze of spring twilight began to fall over the stocks and lilies, violets and pinks in the gardens sloping to the river, still flashing in the sinking sun, and the first breaths of evening were wafted through the open windows of the Palace, delicious with the perfume of these beds of sweets, the Queen went herself and alone to the cabinet where the King kept his anguished vigil.

For a while he would not open, even to the sound of her voice, but after she had waited there a little, like a suppliant, she heard his step, the key was turned, and he admitted her. She entered swiftly and flung herself at his feet, as she had done at their first meeting nearly twenty years ago, when he had lifted her young loveliness to his heart, there to for ever remain.

Now she was a worn woman, her beauty prematurely obscured by distresses, and he was far different from the radiant cavalier who had welcomed her to England, but the fire of love lit then in the heart of each had not abated ; even now, in the midst of his misery of mind, he raised her up as tenderly, as reverently, as when she had first come to him.

' Mary,' he said brokenly, ' Mary.'

He kissed her cold cheek as he drew her to his shoulder, and she felt his tears.

But her mood was not one of weeping ; her frail figure, her delicate features, were alert and quivering with energy ; her large vivid eyes glanced eagerly round the room. On

the King's private black and gold Chinese bureau lay the warrant for my Lord Strafford's execution. So hasty and resolved was the Parliament, also, perhaps, so confident of their power to force the King's assent, that the warrant had been sent before the royal consent had been given to the Bill.

The Queen drew herself away from Charles and rested her glance on him. She wore a white gown enriched with silver damask flowers, her face, too, was colourless save for a feverish flush under her eyes, and the long-admired black locks hung neglected and disarranged over her deep lace collar. She was a sorrowful and reproachful figure as she stood regarding him so intently.

The King's white sick face, too, wore a look of utter suffering, in his narrowed eyes was a bitterness beyond sorrow.

'Sire,' said the Queen in a formal tone, 'you shut yourself up here when it would more befit you to come forth and face what must be faced.' She set her teeth, 'The people are at the very gates.'

Charles took a step back against the heavy brocaded hangings of the wall.

'I will not sign—no—I will not assent,' he muttered.

'Will not? Will not?' cried the Queen. 'Charles, thou hast no choice.'

'Dost thou advise me to do this infamous thing?' answered the King in a terrible voice. 'He is my friend, his peril is through serving me; and he trusts me, relies on me—that is enough. Even as you came I had resolved that, not even to save my sacred Crown, would I abandon Strafford.'

'And what of me and my children?' asked the Queen, in a still voice; 'do we come after thy servant? Is thy love for me grown so halting that I come last?'

The King winced.

'Who would touch thee?' he murmured.

'Even those who, now outside this very palace, cry insults against the Papist and the Frenchwoman. Charles, I tell thee this is playing on the edge of a revolution—are we all to go to ruin for Strafford's sake?'

'He went to ruin for mine,' replied the King.

‘He failed,’ said the Queen, ‘and he pays. When we fail, we too will pay. But this is not our time. The people demand Strafford, and we will not risk our Crowns and lives by refusing this demand.’

‘He trusts me,’ repeated Charles, ‘and I do love him. He served me well, he was loyal . . . our God help me ! . . . my friend——’

He turned away to hide the uncontrollable tears, and, opening a drawer in the little Chinese cabinet, fumbled blindly among some papers and pulled out a letter.

‘This is what he wrote me,’ he faltered. ‘I have never had one like him in my service. . . . Mary . . . I cannot let him die.’

He sank into a chair and, resting his elbow on the arm of it, dropped his face into his hand ; the other held the letter of my lord written from the Tower.

The Queen had read this epistle ; at the time it had moved her, but now that sensation of generous pity was dried up in the fierce desire to save her husband and herself from all the ruin a revolution threatened. She went up to the King and took the letter from his inert fingers, and, glancing over it, read aloud a passage—

“ ‘Sir, my consent shall more acquit you herein to God, than all the world can do besides. To a willing man there is no injury done ; and as by God’s grace I forgive all the world with calmness and meekness of infinite contentment to my dislodging soul, so, sir, to you I can give the life of this world with all the cheerfulness imaginable, in the just acknowledgment of your exceeding favours.’—

‘Hear !’ added the Queen breathlessly, ‘the man himself does not ask nor expect this sacrifice of you——’

Charles interrupted.

‘Because he is magnanimous, shall I be a slavish coward ?’

‘He is willing to die,’ urged the Queen ; ‘he is pleased to give his life for you——’

‘Willing to die ? Where is there a man willing to die ? There is none to be found, however old, wretched, or mean. Deceive not thyself, Strafford is young, strong, full of joy and life—he hath a wife and children and others dear to him—is it like that he is *willing* to die ?’

The Queen's eyes did not sink before the miserable reproach in her husband's gaze.

'Willing or no, he *must* die,' she said firmly. 'He must go. Stand not in the way of his fate.'

'He shall not die through me,' said Charles, with a bitter doggedness. 'Am I never to sleep sound again for thinking of how I abandoned this man? He came to London, Mary, on our promise of protection.'

'We have done what we could,' returned Henriette Marie, unmoved, 'and now we can do no more.'

'I will not,' said the King, as if repeating the words gave him strength. 'I will not. Do they want everything I love—first Buckingham—now Strafford——'

'Then me,' flashed the Queen. 'Think of that, if you think of your wife at all.'

This reproach was so undeserved as to be grotesque. In all the King's concerns, from the most important to the most foolish, she had always come foremost, and this was the first occasion on which he had not absolutely thrown himself on her judgment and bowed to her desires.

Some such reflection must have crossed his tortured mind.

'You always disliked Strafford,' was all he said.

'No,' said the Queen vehemently, as if she disclaimed some shameful thing. 'No, never, and I would have saved him. Do not take me to be so mean and creeping a creature as to counsel you pass this Bill because I hate my lord.'

She was justified in her defence; she had been jealous of the powerful minister, and she had never personally liked him, but it was not for vengeance or malice that she urged the King to abandon Strafford, but because she was afraid of that power which asked for his death, and because her tyrannical royal pride detested the thought that she and hers should be in an instant's danger for the sake of a subject. And when she saw her husband, for the first time since their marriage, so absorbed in anguished thought as to be scarcely aware of her presence, as to be forgetful of her and her children, she felt jealous of this other influence that seemed to defy hers, and a fierceness that was akin to cruelty touched her desperation.

'Who is this man that I should be endangered for his sake?' she cried, after she had in vain waited for the King to break his dismal silence.

'He is my friend,' muttered Charles.

'Save him then, or share his fate,' returned his wife bitterly. 'As for me, I will go to my own country, and there find the protection that you cannot give me.'

Charles sprang up and faced her.

'Mary, what is this? What do you speak of?' he cried in a distracted voice, and holding out to her his irresolute hands.

The Queen took advantage of this sudden weakening of his silent defences; her whole manner changed. She went up to him softly, took his hands in hers, and, raising to him a face pale and pleading, broke out into eager and humble entreaties.

'My Charles, let him go—let us be happy again—do not, for this scruple, risk everything! My dear, give way—it must be—we are in danger—oh, listen to me!'

He stared at her with eyes clouded with suffering.

'Couldst thou but put this eloquence on the other side I might be a happier man,' he said. 'Strengthen my conscience, do not weaken it.'

His tone was as pleading as hers had been, but she perceived that he was still obdurate on the main part of her entreaty, and she slipped from his clasp and knelt at his feet in a genuine passion of tears.

'You have had the last of me!' she sobbed. 'I will not stay where neither my dignity nor my life is safe. Keep Strafford and let me go!'

The King turned away with feeble and unsteady steps, and going to the window pulled aside the olive velvet curtains.

The twilight had fallen and the sky was pale to colourlessness; low on the horizon, beyond the river, sombre banks of clouds were rising, and at the edge of them, floating free in the purity of the sky, was the evening star, sparkling with the frosty light of Northern climes.

The King fixed his eyes on this star, but without hope of comfort; cold and disdainful seemed star and heavens, and God pitiless and very far away behind the storm-clouds.

There was no command, no excuse, no reproof for him from on High ; in his own heart the decision must be and now—at once—within the next hour. At that moment life seemed unutterably hateful to the King ; everything in the world, even the figure of his wife, he viewed with a touch of sick disgust ; the taint of what he was about to do was already over him, his life was already stained with baseness, his happiness corrupted.

He knew, as he stared at the icy star that was already being veiled by the on-rushing vapours of the rain-cloud, that he would abandon Strafford.

Though he knew that it would be better to be that man in the Tower, against whose ardent life the decree had gone forth, than himself in his palace, secure by the sacrifice of that faithful servant ; though he knew that in the bloody grave of his betrayed friend would be entombed for ever his own tranquillity and peace of mind, yet he also knew that it was not in him to stand firm against those inexorable ones who demanded Strafford, against the tears and reproaches of his wife, against his own inner fears and weaknesses which whispered to him dread and terror of these hateful Parliament men and of this mutinous city of London.

In his heart he had always known that he would fail Strafford if it ever came to a sharp issue, yea, he had known it when he urged his minister to come from York, and that made this moment the more awful, that his secret weakness which he had never admitted to himself, was forced into life.

He would forsake Strafford to buy the safety of his Crown, his family, his person, and Strafford would forgive him (he could picture the look of incredulous pity on the condemned man's dark face when the sentence was read to him), and the Parliament would scorn him.

Through the entanglement of his bitter and humiliating reflections, he became aware of the sound of the persistent low sobbing of the Queen in the darkening room behind him, and he turned, letting the curtains fall together over the fading heavens, the brightening star, the oncoming storm.

The scanty light that now filled the chamber was only

enough to let him discern the white blur of his wife's figure as she knelt before one of the brocade chairs with her dark head lost in the shadows and her hands upraised in a startling position of prayer.

Her sobs, even and continuous as the breaths of a peaceful sleeper, filled the rich chamber, the splendours of which were now gloomed over with shadow, with sorrow.

Presently, as he watched her, and as he listened, the grim sharpness of his anguish was melted into a weak grief at her distress ; his impotency to protect her from tears became his main torment.

' Mary,' he said, ' Mary—it is over—think no more of it—go to bed and sleep in peace. London shall be content to-night.'

He stumbled towards her, and she rose up swiftly and straightly, holding her rag of wet white handkerchief to her wet white face.

' Ah, Charles !' she exclaimed, her voice thick from her weeping.

She held out her arms, he took her to his heart and bowed his shamed head on her shoulder ; but after a very little while he put her away.

' Leave me now !'

' This thing must be done at once—to-night—I cannot tell how long they can hold the gates——'

' I must go out,' said Charles, with utmost weariness ; ' get me a light, my dear, my beloved.'

She found the flint and tinder and, with deftness and expedition, lit the lamp of crystal and silver gilt which stood on the King's private bureau.

As the soft, gracious flame illumined the room, the King, who was leaning against the tapestry like a sick man, looked at once towards the fatal paper and beside it the pen and ink dish ready.

The Queen stood waiting ; her face was all blotted and swollen with weeping ; she looked a frail and piteous figure ; her youth seemed suddenly in one day dead, and her beauty already a thing of yesterday.

' It is well I love thee,' said Charles, ' otherwise what I do would make hell for me. Oh, if I had *not* loved thee, never, never would I have done this thing !'

‘We shall forget it,’ answered the Queen, ‘and we shall live,’ she added, straining her hoarse voice to a note of passion, ‘to avenge ourselves.’

She spoke to a man of a nature absolutely unforgiving, and at this moment her mention of vengeance came like comfort to his anguish and palliation of his baseness.

‘I will never forget, I will never pardon,’ he swore, lifting up his hand towards heaven. ‘Never, never shall there be peace between me and Parliament until this shame is covered over with blood.’

He snatched up the warrant with trembling hand.

‘Send some lords to me,’ he cried. ‘I cannot sign this myself—get it done—bring this most hateful day to an end!’

He sank into the chair on which her tears had fallen, and stared at the paper clutched in his fingers as if it was a sight of horror.

Henriette Marie hastened away to tell the waiting deputies of the Houses that the King would pass the Bill, and as she went she heard a cry intense enough to have carried to the Tower where my lord sat waiting the news of his fate.

‘Oh, Strafford! Strafford! my friend!’

CHAPTER VII

AUTUMN, 1641

‘**T**HINGS go too far and too fast for me, and though men speak of the progress we make, to me it seemeth more like a progress into calamities unspeakable.’

The young man who spoke leant against the dark-blue and gold diapered wall of the antechamber to the House of Commons, in Westminster Hall; members and their friends were passing to and fro; in a few days the memorable and triumphant session would adjourn. The King was in Scotland, employed, as the Parliament well knew, in one of his innumerable intrigues, this time an endeavour to bring a Northern army into London. The Scots, since the imperfect peace he had patched with them, remained

his chief hope. Mr. Hampden was in Edinburgh watching him, but Mr. Pym remained in London, the mainspring of the popular party.

It was late August of the year my Lord Strafford ('putting off my doublet as cheerfully now as I ever did when I went to my bed,' he had said), had walked to his death on Tower Hill. Archbishop Laud was a prisoner, and the King had given his consent to a series of Acts which swept away those grievances which the people had complained of, and, most momentous of all, he had passed a law by which it was impossible for him to dissolve Parliament without its own consent.

Therefore it might seem that affairs had never been so bright and hopeful for the leaders of the reforming party, and yet this young gentleman, leaning against the wall and staring at the pool of sunlight the Gothic window cast at his feet, spoke in a tone of melancholy and foreboding.

He had always been a close follower and friend of Pym and Hampden, and always ardent for the public good—one of the keen, swift spirits whose direct courage had helped the House to triumph, but now he stood dejected and rather in the attitude of one who has suffered defeat.

His companion, who was but a few years older, regarded him with a thoughtful air, then glanced dubiously at the crowds which filled the chamber and from which they, in the corner by the window, stood a little apart.

'I take your meaning,' he replied, after a considerable pause. 'I see a bigger cleavage between King and people than I, for one, ever meant there to be, and prospects of a division in this nation which will be a long while healing.'

He bent his gaze on the other side of the chamber where Mr. Pym and Mr. Cromwell were talking loudly and at great length together.

If any casual observer had looked in at this assembly, assuredly it would have been this man by the window at whom they would have glanced longest and oftenest.

His appearance would have been noticeable in any gathering, for it was one of the most unusual beauty and charm.

He was no more than thirty years of age, and the delicate smoothness of his countenance was such as belongs to even earlier years, and gave him, indeed, an air of almost feminine refinement and gentleness; his long love-locks were pale brown, his heavy lidded eyes of a soft and changeable grey, and the expression of his lips, set firmly under the slight shade of the fashionable moustaches, was one of great sweetness.

The whole expression of his face was a tenderness and purity seldom seen in masculine traits; yet in no way did he appear weak, and his bearing showed energy and resolution.

His dress, of an olive green, was carefully enriched with rough gold embroidery, and his linen, laces, and other appointments were of a finer quality than those worn by the other gentlemen there.

Such was Lucius Carey, my Lord Viscount Falkland, one of the noblest, in degree and soul, of those who had combined to curb and confine the tyranny of the King.

His companion was Mr. Edward Hyde, an ordinary looking blonde gentleman, inclined to stoutness, and a prominent member of the more moderate section of the dominant Commons.

He followed the direction of the Viscount's gaze and remarked, in a low tone—

‘Those two are getting matters very-much into their own hands, and Mr. Cromwell, at least, is too extreme.’

‘What more do they want?’ asked my Lord Falkland. ‘The King hath redressed the grievances we laboured under. They strained the very utmost of the law (nay, more than the law) on the Earl of Strafford, and to push matters further smacks of disloyalty to His Majesty.’

‘My Lord,’ answered Mr. Hyde firmly, ‘reformers are ever apt to run a headlong course, and some excesses must be excused those who have so laboured at the general good——’

‘Excesses?’ answered my lord, flushing a little. ‘I am still an Anglican, by the grace of God, and when I see altars dragged from their places, rood screens smashed, all pictures, images, and carvings destroyed in our churches until God's houses look as if they were the poor remnants

of a besieged city,—when I know that this is by order of Parliament, then methinks it seemeth as if violence had taken the place of zeal.'

'Neither do these things please me,' answered Mr. Hyde, 'but the dams are broken and there are swift tides running in all directions. And who is to stem them?'

'Or who,' asked my lord sadly, 'to guide them into proper channels? Not your "root and branch men," who would sweep every bishop and every prayer book out of the land. Not by such intolerance or bigotry, Mr. Hyde, are we to gain peace and liberty.'

'Moderate counsels,' returned the other, 'own but a weak voice in these bitter savoured times. It is such as this Oliver Cromwell, with their loud rude speech, who are hearkened to.'

'I only half like this noisy Mr. Cromwell,' said my lord. 'He hath sprung very suddenly into notice, and seemeth to have, on an instant, gained much authority with Mr. Pym and Mr. Hampden.'

At this moment the object of their speech turned his head and looked at them as if he had heard his own name. Lord Falkland smiled at him and made a little gesture of beckoning.

Mr. Cromwell instantly left his friends and came over to the window, where he stood in the gold flush of sunshine and looked keenly at the two young aristocrats.

'More plots, eh,' he asked pleasantly.

'More talk only, sir,' smiled the Viscount.

Mr. Cromwell laid his heavy muscular hand on my lord's arm.

'Thou art worthy,' he remarked; 'but what shall I say of thee?' his narrowed grey eyes rested on Mr. Hyde's florid face. 'Thou art he who bloweth neither hot nor cold.'

'I am like to blow hot enough, I think,' returned Mr. Hyde, 'unless thou blow more cold.'

'Wherein have I vexed thee?' asked Oliver Cromwell, with a pleasantness that might have covered contempt.

'Your party is too extreme, sir,' said the Viscount earnestly. 'You press too hard upon the weakness of His Majesty. What we set out to gain hath been gained

and safeguarded by law. You should now go moderately, and, from what I know of your councils, you do not propose moderation.'

Mr. Cromwell's face hardened into heavy, almost lowering lines.

'So you, too, slacken!' he exclaimed. 'You would join those who rise up against us! Fie, my lord, I had better hopes.'

'Mr. Cromwell,' returned the Viscount, 'we have been long together on the same road; but if your mind is what I do think it to be, then here we come to a parting, and many Christian gentlemen will follow my way.'

Oliver Cromwell regarded him with intense keenness.

'What do you think my mind to be?' he demanded.

'I think you rush forward to utterly destroy the Anglican Church and to so limit the King's authority that he is no more than a show piece in the realm.'

'Maybe that and maybe more than that,' returned Mr. Cromwell. 'Even as the Lord directeth: "He shall send down from on high to fetch me and shall take me out of many waters." I stand here, a poor instrument, waiting His will.'

This answer bore the fervent and ambiguous character that Lord Falkland had noticed in this gentleman's speeches, and which might be due either to enthusiasm or guile, and which was, at least, difficult to answer.

'You run too much against the King,' said Mr. Hyde, 'and against the Church of England. Our aim was to clear her of abuses, not to destroy her.'

'Our aim, Mr. Hyde?' interrupted the Member for Cambridge keenly. 'Were our aims ever the same, from the very first? I saw one thing, you another; but trouble me not now with this vain discourse,' he added, with a note of great strength in his hoarse voice, 'when I know you are in communication with His Majesty and but seek an opportunity to leave us.'

Edward Hyde flushed, but answered at once and with pride.

'I make no secret of it that, if the Parliament forget all duty to the King, I shall not.'

'Are you afraid?' asked Mr. Cromwell, with more

sadness than contempt. 'Or do you look for promotion and honours from His Majesty? There is no satisfaction in such glory, "but hope thou in the Lord and He shall promote thee, that thou shalt possess the land; when the ungodly shall perish, thou shalt see it."'

'You do us wrong!' exclaimed Lord Falkland. 'We hold to loyalty; we think of that and not of base rewards.'

'Loyalty!' exclaimed Mr. Cromwell vehemently. 'We own loyalty to One higher than the King, yet what saith St. Paul: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Therefore we go not definitely against His Majesty, but rather wait, hoping still for peaceable issues and fair days, yet abating nothing of our just demands nor of our high hopes.'

'Go your ways as you see them set clear before you,' returned the Viscount; 'but as for me, all is confusion and I have begun to ponder many things.'

'"A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways,"' said the Puritan firmly, 'and such can be of no use to us. Go serve the King and take ten thousand with you, and still we stand the stronger.'

Mr. Hyde's personal dislike of the speaker, as well as his loyalty and conservative principles, spurred him into a hot answer.

'Do you then admit you do not serve the King?' he asked. 'Are we to hear open rebellion?'

'God knoweth what we shall hear and what we shall see,' said Mr. Cromwell grimly. 'There will be more wonders abroad than thy wits will be able to cope with, methinks, Mr. Hyde.'

'My wits stand firm,' smiled that gentleman, 'and my faith is uncorrupt and my sword is practised.'

'The sword!' repeated Oliver Cromwell, putting his hand slowly on the plain little weapon by his side. 'Speak not of the sword! Englishman have not, sir, come to that, and will not, unless they be forced.'

'Yet,' said Lord Falkland quietly, 'do you not perceive that by your actions you provoke the possibilities of bloodshed? Already the Lords have fallen away from you

—the King hath many friends even among the Commons, and they are not less resolute, less courageous, less convinced of the justice of their desires than you yourself—how then are these divided parties to be brought together unless a temperate action and a mild counsel be employed? The King hath held his hand—*sir, hold yours.*

With these words, which he uttered in a stately fashion and almost in the tone of a warning, the young lord, taking Mr. Hyde by the arm, was turning away, but Oliver Cromwell, with an earnest gesture, caught his hand.

‘Lucius Carey, stay thou with us,’ he said.

Lord Falkland let his slight hand remain in the Puritan’s powerful grasp, and turned his serene, mournful eyes on to the older man’s stern, eloquent face.

‘Mr. Cromwell,’ he replied, ‘believe me honest as yourself. You left plenty and comfort for this toilsome business of Parliament, and I also put some ease by that I might do a little service here. My cause is your cause, the cause of liberty. I despise the courtier and hate the tyrant, but I believe in the old creeds, too, Mr. Cromwell, and that the King is as like to save us as any other gentleman. Therefore, if henceforth you see little of me, believe that I obey my conscience as you do follow yours.’

Mr. Cromwell released his hand and said no other word.

‘A good night,’ smiled Lord Falkland, and raising his beaver, left Westminster Hall with Edward Hyde.

Lord Essex came up to the window, and to him Oliver Cromwell turned sharply.

‘There go two who will join the King’s party,’ he said bluntly, pointing after the two Cavaliers.

‘They have long been of that mind,’ replied Lord Essex dryly. ‘Mr. Hyde goeth to seek advancement and my lord because he is tender towards the clergy.’

‘I would have kept my lord,’ remarked Mr. Cromwell, with a touch of wistfulness in his tone. ‘He is a goodly youth and a brave, and hath too fair a soul to join with idolators and Papists.’

Meanwhile Lord Falkland, having parted from Mr. Hyde, was walking along the river-bank, where an uneven row of houses edged the gardens of Northumberland House, Whitehall, and the estates of the Buckingham family.

The scene was thrice familiar to Lord Falkland, but his sensitive soul and quick eye were alive to every detail of the street, the people, and the river.

He loved England, he loved London and the crooked river, built over with crooked houses, from which rose the churches with the Gothic towers or lead cupolas; but to-night this love made him feel melancholy. He had a premonition that terror and discord would descend on the beloved city, on the beloved land, and that he would be able to avail nothing against those relentless forces of which Mr. Cromwell was typical, and which seemed to be sweeping him on to tumult and strife.

He had left all the delights of his wealthy retirement—his dear family, his dear friends, and his dear literature—that he might help his country in the pass to which she had come.

And now he had himself arrived at a pass and must decide whether he would remain with the party by which he had so far stood, or remain loyal to the ancient Church and the ancient constitution which his fathers had served and defended.

He paused in his walk when he reached Whitehall stairs, and turned to look at the splendid new palace as it rose above the gardens and the houses.

Then he called a pair of oars and was rowed to Chelsea Reaches to gain the sweeter air of the country and to have leisure on the bosom of the river and under the flaming sky to deal with the perplexing thoughts that vexed his noble mind.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NEWS FROM IRELAND

MR. CROMWELL was in his chamber writing letters; it was a few weeks before the expected return of the King and the opening of Parliament, and the Member for Cambridge had come up to London early to confer with Mr. Pym and other leaders of the popular party on the so-called Remonstrance, otherwise the exposition of the case against Charles, and of the hopes

and fears and perils of the Parliament, already divided within its own walls by the standing back or falling aside of men like Falkland and Hyde.

It was a challenge to the King and to those who supported him, and if passed would prove a shrewder blow to royalty than even the death of Strafford.

For the rest, events were, for such a time of unrest, going with surprising smoothness and quietness for the Parliament; it was now generally known that the King had failed in his endeavours to bring down a northern army to overawe Westminster, and though his plots, the intrigues of the Queen and her Romanist advisers were incessant and served to keep the Commons in a continual state of watchfulness and alarm, they had hitherto been fruitless, and Mr. Pym and Mr. Cromwell, though they might be accounted the strongest opponents of the King, yet now hoped to bring or force Charles to reason and put the kingdom in good order without recourse to more rioting or ferment.

Oliver Cromwell, thinking of these things with satisfaction, and having sealed his letter, rose to light the lamp, for the gloomy October day, foggy and brown at the brightest, was drawing to a close.

When he had trimmed and lit the lamp, he heard a familiar footstep on the stairs, and, going swiftly to the door, opened it on John Pym.

‘I did not expect thee,’ said Mr. Cromwell, smiling.

His visitor passed him and, throwing himself into the great chair fitted with worn leather cushions near the yet unshuttered window, stared at his friend with such a visible disturbance in his usually composed and bold features that Mr. Cromwell was surprised into an exclamation—

‘What news is there?’

A grim smile stirred John Pym’s pale lips.

‘Where hast thou been all this day that thou hast not heard?’

‘Here, since midday, and never a breath of news could reach me if some friend did not bring it.’

John Pym put his hand to his forehead; he looked old and ill and more utterly overmastered by emotion than his colleague had ever before seen him.

'Evil news, Mr. Pym?' and the energetic Puritan's mind flew to that centre of mischief, the King and Queen in Scotland.

'Evil news,' repeated the older man sombrely, 'news that hath set London in a frenzy. They are running mad in the streets now—news that will make some swift conclusion here inevitable.'

A light that was perhaps as much of pleasurable anticipation and satisfaction as of regret or anger brightened Mr. Cromwell's eyes as he answered—

'Tell me—as quick as may be—tell me this grievous thing.'

'The full news has not come to hand yet—only a couple of desperate messengers and this afternoon three more expresses confirming it.'

He paused, for his voice was fast breaking under the strain of what he had to utter.

'The lamp is smoking,' he said, to steady himself.

Mr. Cromwell slowly turned down the wick, then Mr. Pym resumed in a controlled and normal voice.

'There has been a most bloody rising in Ireland. The popish Irish have risen against the English in Ulster—one of them, O'Neil, hath declared he holdeth a commission from the King. Mr. Cromwell, the fearful stories are beyond belief—thousands have been massacred, and the whole Island is in a welter of barbarous confusion.'

A groan of passionate horror and fury broke from Oliver Cromwell; all the hatred of the Englishman for the Irish, of the Puritan for the Papist, of the champion of freedom for the King and tyrant stirred in his heart.

'This is the Queen's doing!' he exclaimed as half London had exclaimed in the same rage and anguish.

'That is the popular cry,' said Mr. Pym; 'but we must be above the popular cries and reason out this thing ourselves. Maybe this Phelim O'Neil lieth, maybe the Queen hath no hand in this slaying of the Protestants.'

'Canst thou deny,' cried Mr. Cromwell, 'that she and her priests of Baal have ever given pernicious advice to the King? Oh, wretched country that ever had this cursed Frenchwoman set over it!'

‘ Let the Queen go,’ said John Pym. ‘ We are not concerned with her, we cannot strike at her ; our business is with the King. Compose thyself—I am come to confer with thee.’

‘ I cannot so easily be calm,’ answered Mr. Cromwell, ‘ when I consider how God’s English have been treated—are, at this moment, being tormented and slain ! ’

‘ This is the sowing,’ returned Mr. Pym grimly. ‘ By and by will come the harvest.’

‘ May I be there to help gather it ! ’ cried the Member for Cambridge. ‘ May God preserve me to a little aid in avenging His people.’

‘ The time will come,’ said John Pym, ‘ “ for the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers ; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.” ’

Oliver Cromwell dropped his chin on his breast, as his fashion was when deeply moved ; but John Pym raised his authoritative face and spoke again.

‘ At this moment we must consider how this event is like to bear on the issues at Westminster. We must be ready. I do not dare to hold the King responsible for this most horrible work in Ireland, though I fear he will find it hard to clear his name before the popular eye ; but this much is proven—he had a plot with the Irish gentry to gain Dublin for himself, and there to raise an army to send against us.’

‘ Aye, the sword,’ muttered Cromwell, ‘ the power of the sword ! ’

‘ Even of that have I come to speak,’ pursued John Pym. ‘ Thou, sagacious as thou art, canst see the next move the King will take when he returneth without the help he hoped for from Scotland ? ’

The other lifted his fine head quickly.

‘ He will demand an army for the reconquest of Ireland,’ he said briefly. ‘ And as I hope for mercy,’ he added solemnly, ‘ he shall not have it ! ’

‘ The only army the Parliament will raise will be one under its own control and officered by its own men,’ replied John Pym ; ‘ but the struggle will be sharp. We have now such men as Hyde and Falkland against us,

and the King's Episcopalian party gathereth strength in the House and in the country.'

He was silent a while, then he gave a great sigh of mental distress and physical weariness.

'Is it too late to hope for peace?' he murmured, as if speaking to himself. 'Is it too late?'

'It is too late,' blazed out Cromwell, 'to trust the King. Too late, indeed! Unless we wish to wait another Saint Bartholomew—another Valtelline. It is not so long since this Queen's house had those damnable murders done on poor Protestants—she who designed that devilry was a Medici. Was not this woman's mother of that family? And was not the King's grandmother from that same idolatrous court, and was she not a wanton Papist? Trust none of them, Mr. Pym, nor Stewart, nor Bourbon, but listen to the Lord's bidding, even as He commandeth, and care nothing for any other.'

'Thou didst not use to be so hot against the King,' said John Pym.

'I did not know his subtle tricks, his shifts, his deceptions, his lies, his faithlessness, his great unreason. Hath he not given us his challenge? What did he not write this very month from Scotland? Mindst thou his words? 'I am constant to the discipline and doctrine of the Church of England established by Queen Elizabeth and my father, and I resolve, by the Grace of God, to die in the maintenance of it.' And then he proceedeth to fill up the vacant bishoprics, and with those very divines against whom we were bringing a charge of treason. Then what thou hast said, even this moment, of Ireland—tell me not that it was not his sceptre which was the staff that stirred up this flame! No more dealings with Charles, Mr. Pym: the time for that is past.'

The extraordinary strength and grandeur that emanated from the speaker's personality, clothing it with that magnificence that is usually only bestowed by the knowledge of high power or a mighty station, was impressed on Mr. Pym as never, perhaps, before; and it flashed into the mind of the bold parliamentary leader that here might be indeed that champion of great fearlessness, indomitable purpose, spiritual enthusiasm, and broad views who would

soon be necessary to second him and even to take his place, for he, John Pym, was not young, and was worn with years of infinite labour. Times, too, had immensely changed since first he had stepped forward to defend the English law and English liberties, and in the new, strange, perhaps terrific epoch coming it might well be that a man would be needed of qualities different from his own.

Hitherto John Pym had not looked upon Oliver Cromwell as other than an able and enthusiastic lieutenant ; he had ranked him below men of the intellectual calibre and fine culture of Hampden and Falkland, and though he had never doubted his willingness in the cause of freedom, he had not given much thought to his capacity. But lately—when Cromwell had fired at the King's appointment of the obnoxious priests, when he had spoken by his side for the exclusion of the bishops from Parliament, when he had seconded the attack on the Prayer Book—Pym had noticed in him the gleam of rare and splendid qualities.

And as he looked at him now, a man of homely simplicity in appearance, yet conveying, by some magic of the spirit, a splendour and a force such as is found once among tens of thousands, his heart leapt with a deep inward joy.

'Thou art very fit to challenge the King,' he said quietly.

The Calvinist was in no way moved by this.

'I may be an instrument,' he said, 'but the way is confused and troubled ; we draw near the whirlpool, and unless God make Himself manifest, how are we to avoid being sucked into destruction ? '

He began to pace the room with uneven and agitated steps.

'I would not be the first to draw the sword ! ' he cried ; 'but if the Lord make it law and putteth it into my hands, shall I not strike ? Oh, Mr. Pym, war is an awful thought, and we hang on the edge of dreadful conclusions ; but is this the moment to turn back or pause ? "Teach me, O Lord, the way of Thy statute, and I will keep it to the end ! Give me understanding and I will keep Thy law ; yea, I will keep it with my whole heart ! " '

He paused by the farther wall, resting one hand against the wood panelling, and with the other wiping his brow and lips with a plain cambric handkerchief.

John Pym sat motionless in the great arm-chair, leaning forward a little and looking intently and with a kind of quiet eagerness at the younger man.

'When I heard this afternoon of the confirmation of this dismal and lamentable news from Ireland, when I foresaw that the King had now an excuse to demand an army—then I too thought—God hath spoken, and it must be the sword.'

Oliver Cromwell's whole stout frame trembled, as if responding to some intense and suppressed emotion.

'England! England!' he muttered, 'are we come to have to heal thy hurts with the bloody steel and the devouring flame? I had hoped differently.'

'If the King armeth so must we,' said John Pym. 'But there is yet some hope. Hyde and Falkland are now something in the councils of the King, and he may listen to them.'

'My Lord Falkland will do a true man's uttermost,' replied Cromwell, with that sudden tenderness that was as natural to him as his sudden fierceness. 'But will he avail? I have but a mean opinion of Mr. Hyde.'

'Neither he nor my Lord Viscount have a grasp bold enough nor an outlook sure enough for these difficult times. But their advice will better that of the Queen and the priests, and in them resteth our last hopes of a peaceable settlement.'

As Pym spoke he rose and, going over to Cromwell, grasped him by the shoulders and looked earnestly into his face. In age there was nearly twenty years difference between the two men, and the appearance of the lawyer who had led a studious life in cities was very different from that of the robust country gentleman; but their look of ardour, of resolution, of steadfastness was the same, and John Pym's face, marked with years and faded by ill-health, held the same brightness of a high purpose as the blunt, fresh features of the younger man, still in the height and prime of his vigorous strength.

'Thou wilt be a man much needed in the times to come,' said Mr. Pym, 'for I think thou hast the gift of fortitude.'

Oliver Cromwell did not answer; in his mind's eye

he saw that misty day outside St. Ives, the black river, the black houses, the gnarled and bent willows, the church spire pointing to an obscure heaven, the flat bog leading to Erith's Bulwark, beyond—the rude paling—all the common details of that familiar scene where he had first entered into covenant with God.

The glory of the vision had faded, and melancholies had taken the place of that unspeakable joy and wonder ; but a faith that never weakened was always there and sometimes flashed up, as now, into a dazzling remembrance of that other November day and the promise of the Lord.

‘Englishmen such as thee are greatly wanted now,’ added Mr. Pym after a little.

Mr. Cromwell suddenly flashed into a smile which had a certain steady happiness in it, as if he had gained contentment from his momentary absorption or reverie.

‘There are many better than I!’ he answered. ‘Poor reeds, Mr. Pym, but by binding us together thou mayst make a stout birch for thy purpose!’

He turned and took his hat and mantle from a peg on the wall.

‘I will come out with thee,’ he said, ‘and see how things go in London.’

As the two gentlemen went together down the narrow stairs, Pym, in a few words, gave his companion the outlines of the next momentous measure he intended to bring forward at this juncture, when the public frenzy at the Irish rebellion and the atrocious circumstances of it would be occupying Parliament as well as people.

‘I shall ask that military appointments may be under parliamentary control, Mr. Cromwell, and that His Majesty take only such advisers as the nation can approve ; also that my Lord of Essex be given the command of the train bands—under the authority of Parliament, not the King.’

‘Well dost thou seize the moment!’ returned the other, in a tone of admiration. ‘Turning even these events of horror into profit for liberty, methinks thou hast the King so stript of all pretences that he will scarce be able to find any rag of Popery to cover his bareness.’

'Take care,' said John Pym, gently laying his hand on his friend's cuff, 'that thou dost not underestimate those forces opposed to thee.'

'And thou,' replied Cromwell, 'that thou dost not underestimate thine own strength and power.'

They came out into the ill-lit street, down which the sleet was sweeping in icy spears; the close, stale odours of the city encompassed them, and the bitter damp struck through their mantles and made their flesh shiver.

'Methinks,' said Cromwell, 'this dark air is full of portents and heavy with forebodings. Thou knowest, Mr. Pym, that we stand in a little mean street, in the cold and darkness, in the midst of a distressed and oppressed city, yet I tell thee the Lord hath us by the hand and will lead us yet into the freedom and light of great spaces, there to work His will.'

CHAPTER IX

JOHN PYM AND THE KING

'THIS is Lord Falkland's advice,' said the Queen, 'and I do wonder you should so listen to one who was but lately in the forefront of your enemies and even now is close with them.'

'It is the advice of the moderate men,' returned Charles, with a sneer on the adjective, 'and I must listen to them. Patience, my dear, my beloved. If I could win John Pym it were worth some sacrifice of pride.'

'Things run more smoothly in your favour now,' retorted Henriette Marie, 'and you have no need for these concessions. Was not our welcome to London fair enough? And do not your friends in the Lords grow daily?'

'But the party of John Pym groweth daily also,' said the King grimly, 'and therefore have I sent for him.'

'I do wonder,' cried his wife, 'that you should stoop to parley with one whom we both hold in hatred!'

'Do not imagine,' replied Charles, with intense bitterness, 'that I shall ever forgive John Pym, whom I have long resolved to punish fittingly. But if I can make an

instrument of him, for his own humiliation and my gain, surely I will.'

They were walking in the gardens of Whitehall. It was still winter, but of an extraordinary mildness; a pale and soft blue sky showed between the bare branches, and through the thick carpet of damp brown leaves the fresh little plants and weeds pushed up shoots of green.

Charles and his wife walked slowly along the damp paths; she was wrapped carelessly in a black hood and cloak, and her face was disfigured by a look of annoyance, anxiety, and fatigue.

Her beauty and sweetness seemed to have been lately burnt away by the angry pride and passions the recent troubles had roused in her; she was not one to retain either meekness or gaiety in adversity, and she fretted deeply under what she termed the King's inaction.

Had she been in his place she would have put her fate to the test before now by some act of violence, and instead of making concession after concession, as Charles had done, she would have given the call to arms at the first refusal of the Parliament to do her will or at the first murmur they made against her fiat.

And now, in her eyes, a humiliation deeper than any yet endured was to hand, in the shape of the King's proposed interview with John Pym—a proposal which, as she had guessed, came from Lord Falkland, who was beginning to attach himself to the Court, and who was, as always, working sincerely in the interests of concord, a peaceful settlement, and public security.

As usual, perversity and impatience, frivolity and pride made it impossible for the Queen to grasp the difficulties of her husband's position and how those difficulties had been augmented by the hideous uprisings in Ireland, which continued with all the violence of furious passions loosened after long restraint.

She said no more, however, for she was not the woman to waste words on a matter where she was not likely to prevail.

The King too was silent; his feelings against John Pym were no less bitter than his Queen's hatred of that resolute commoner, and they were tinged with a dreadful

shame and an awful remorse which she did not feel, for the thought of Pym brought with it the thought of Strafford.

When they came to a little turn in one of the paths they beheld ahead of them a very pleasant vista of bare but fresh trees, flecked with sun and covered with splashes and tufts of moss, and on a bench beneath a slender beech a group of youths who were engaged in shooting arrows at a target.

Three of the little company were at the first opening of manhood, two were children. All were unusual in their handsomeness and princely poise as in the richness of their appointments, and four of them were distinguished by a darkness of colouring and vividness of expression commonly associated with the French or Italian, and not likely to be the passport to popularity in England; the fifth and youngest was a beautiful, grave child of eight, or so, with bright complexion and golden auburn hair, who, leaning against the tree, handed to the others the arrows out of a quiver of gilded leather.

His dress heightened his look of fairness, for it was light blue, and the sun fell full over him while the others were in shade and darkly though magnificently attired.

The other child was a lad a year or two older, of no particular beauty, but of a nimble and sprightly appearance, whose irregular features were lit by a pair of very handsome, eloquent, black eyes; seated at the end of the bench, he was at the moment practising his skill at archery and was tugging at a great bow that was almost too stubborn for his strength.

The three young men who were gathered round him, directing and instructing, were obviously brothers; all three of a splendid presence and all characterised by an air of recklessness, arrogance, and a certain rude pride, and one was a youth who would have been distinguished in any company for his extreme handsomeness and his animated, flamboyant personality.

It was he who, with the quickness that accompanied all his motions, turned at the first footfall he heard and discerned the King. At the sight of His Majesty the sport ended, and the young men rose, laughing; but the

fair child, with a certain prim absorption, busied himself in putting the arrows away, and never looked up from his task.

‘The bow is too strong for Charles,’ said the handsome youth with a strong foreign accent.

‘Get thee a smaller one,’ answered the King, smiling at his eldest son, who had cast the bow down with a good-natured grimace.

‘Nay, sire,’ replied the Prince of Wales, ‘it is a play that groweth old-fashioned. I will practise the sword.’

At this the fair boy glanced up from the quiver he was filling.

‘If you will not learn,’ he said, in a voice serious for his years, ‘why waste this time in the essay?’

His brother burst out laughing.

‘To pass the hours, thou wise man!’

‘I love not to pass the time in fooling,’ replied the little Duke of York crossly. ‘If I had thought you would not learn, I would not have held the arrows for you.’

The young man laughed again, and so did the Queen, but the King said quietly—

‘If James hath a mind to be serious—why, it is no ill thing; you, my nephews, might without harm be graver.’

The three princes took this reproof in smiling silence; they made a charming picture in the winter sunlight, in their youth and gaiety and self-confidence and all the graceful airs of pride and rank which well became their thoughtless age and high position.

Two of them, the Elector Palatine and Prince Maurice, moved on through the gardens with their two English cousins and the Queen, but Rupert, the handsome, impatient youth, remained where the King stood thoughtfully by the bench, beside the fallen bow and the quiver of arrows little James had flung down in disgust.

‘Will Your Majesty see this traitor Pym to-day?’ asked Rupert eagerly.

‘Yes, here, and soon,’ replied Charles.

‘He should be treading the scaffold planks, not the King’s garden!’ cried the Prince.

Charles looked at his nephew with mingled affection and

doubt. His own nature was so totally different from that of the headstrong, violent, reckless, and rudely arrogant Prince, that he could not altogether love and trust his nephew; at the same time the young man's eager loyalty, his warm if imprudent championship of the King's every action, could not but endear him to Charles, as did his history of misfortune and the fact that he was the son of the King's only sister, Elizabeth, who had met with troubles undeserved and bravely borne.

He answered with the bitterness that often now flavoured his speech.

'You will taste trouble in your time, Rupert, if you do not learn that such words must not be used of those who lead the people.'

'I shall never be a king or a ruler,' answered Rupert, 'and so can keep a freer tongue. A third son hath no hopes, but few fears, so tantivy to these crop-eared churls, and may I one day have the hunting of them!'

He cast up his beaver as he spoke and caught it again with a laugh of sheer light-heartedness.

'A free lance at your service, sire,' he cried, and stooping near the root of the beech he pulled up a root of violet which bore several pale and small flowers of an exceeding sweetness of perfume.

With quick brown fingers he fastened it into the button-hole of his dark scarlet doublet.

'Here comes the bold rebel,' he said, his loud, deep voice but slightly lowered.

Charles hastily turned his head.

Lord Falkland and John Pym were approaching. The King seated himself and pulled his hat over his eyes as if to conceal the confusion in his countenance when he found himself face to face with the man whom he regarded as his minister's murderer, and Rupert, leaning against the tree, folded his arms on his broad chest in an attitude of contempt and defiance.

The four men made a strange opposition when they came together: the refined sweetness and gentle bearing of the English noble contrasting with the coarse beauty and bold demeanour of the foreign prince, and the severe deportment and graceful figure of the King

opposed to the bent form, simple attire, and quiet carriage of the parliamentary leader.

Both men had approached this interview with reluctance and a sense of hopelessness ; Pym, because he thought that it would be impossible to force the King to sincerity, and the King, because he thought it would be impossible to bend or break Pym.

Charles gave no immediate answer to Lord Falkland's presentation, and made not the least effort to appear gracious. He and Pym were not strangers to each other ; there had been a time, years ago, when it had seemed as if the famous lawyer might be one of those advising and guiding the King.

'Sir,' said Charles at length, 'I know not why I have chosen to see you here, save that the day is fair and we can talk here under the sky as well as under a ceiling.'

'Sir,' replied John Pym simply, 'I have been mewed up so much of late that I am very glad to be in a pleasant place of green.'

'Give us leave, my lord,' said Charles, 'and you, Rupert, we have to confer with this our faithful subject.'

The King's cold sarcasm was not lost on John Pym, whose lips curved into a faint quiet smile, nor on the two young men, one of whom heard with vexation, the other with considerable amusement.

Rupert would, indeed, have liked to have stayed and helped bait and annoy a man whom he regarded as only fit for the branding, the mutilation, the pillory, and the fine which had been the fate of William Prynne a few years earlier, but he bowed to the King's decision and moved away with the Viscount.

Charles looked after the two figures, alike in youth and comeliness, dissimilar in everything else, then turned his stern and weary eyes on John Pym, who stood with his plain hat in his hand, waiting for the King to speak.

'Mr. Pym,' he said abruptly, 'there is much disaffection in the House.'

'Yes, sire.'

'And parties are very sharply divided,' added Charles, alluding to the continued strength of his partisans in the Commons.

John Pym understood him perfectly.

'We have,' he answered, 'much to contend against, but God hath given us success.'

The King's pale face assumed a look even more hard and bitter than before; he knew Pym referred to the passing of the Great Remonstrance which he had carried through the Commons by a narrow majority.

'We?' he exclaimed. 'For whom do you speak when you say "we," Mr. Pym?'

'For those whom Your Majesty wished to deal with when you sent for me,' answered the commoner calmly.

'Ah!' cried the King sharply. 'You think you can boast to my face of your power in the Commons!'

'I can boast to any man's face of the power of the English people,' replied Pym, 'and I believe it is that power that Your Majesty wisheth to reckon with.'

Charles was silent, not being able to master his humiliation and pride sufficiently to speak.

'It is that power Your Majesty *must* reckon with,' added John Pym, without bravado or insult, but with intense firmness.

The blood stained the King's pallor as if it had been called there by a blow.

'You have changed your language since last we spoke together, Mr. Pym!' he cried.

'Much hath changed, sire. There is a broad river with many currents and many whirlpools flowing now through England, and it hath swept away many old landmarks. I do not mean discourtesy, but Your Majesty must have seen for yourself the swift changes of the times.'

'Yes,' replied the King. 'I have marked a crop of sedition such as few sovereigns have been called upon to cope with.'

'And the advisers of Your Majesty have ordered and permitted an upset of the laws such as few peoples have had to endure, and as it is not in the temper of the English to bear.'

A haughty and bitter reply was on Charles' lips, but he remembered that it was his object to in some way gain Pym and Pym's enormous influence, and he summoned his slender stock of tact and patience.

'Mr. Pym,' he said, with dignity, 'we are not here to discuss old grievances, but rather to prepare balm for present sores and to consider how to avoid opening of future wounds.'

John Pym smiled sadly.

'It is all,' he said, 'in Your Majesty's hands.'

'I think,' answered the King, 'that very little is left in my hands. Civil and religious authority is both assailed, and now you would arrest from me the power of the sword.'

'The Parliament should have authority to choose Your Majesty's advisers and to control the army and the militia,' said Pym.

'You try to force me into a corner,' replied Charles, in a still voice. 'But you say it is in my hands,' he added, with an effort. 'Tell me if there is any means you—and I—may pursue together.'

John Pym knew as clearly as if Charles had put it into words that he was appealing for his help; he stood silent, waiting for the King to further reveal himself.

'You have had a long and laborious life, Mr. Pym,' continued Charles, fingering the deep lace on his cuffs. 'I could give you that ease and honour that brings repose.'

'I am sorry Your Majesty said that,' returned the commoner. 'You must know that I am not a second Strafford to leave my party for royal bribes.'

'You dare use that name to me!' blazed Charles, all his wrath and hatred, shame and pain, suddenly laid bare.

'Why not?' returned Pym steadily. 'The death of Thomas Wentworth lieth not at my door. I opposed his impeachment. I wished his punishment, not his blood.'

'Thou and thou only brought him to the block!' cried Charles.

'Nor I, nor any could have done it if his master had chosen to save him,' said John Pym.

'This is too much!' cried Charles, his lips quivering, his eyes reddened and flashing. 'By my soul, it is too much! Against my will was this meeting!'

'I also thought it was too late,' replied Pym; 'but I stand here, ready to serve Your Majesty if Your Majesty will deal sincerely with your people.'

Charles' natural duplicity came to his aid and supplied the place of patience; he mastered the wrath and horror caused in him ever by the mention of Strafford, and answered with sudden and unnatural quietness—

'Mr. Pym,' he said, looking not at him but at his own square-toed shoes and white silk roses on them, 'I do desire concord and plain dealing, nor do I wish to provoke further strife.'

'Your Majesty,' replied Pym, 'then, should stop this great gathering of ruffling Cavaliers who rally to the palace, and this armed guard who insult the passing crowd.'

'What of the Roundhead rabble?' said Charles fiercely, 'who tear my bishops' robes from their backs when they endeavour to make their way across Palace Yard—who insult my Queen because she is Romanist?'

'Your Majesty provoked it,' answered Pym calmly. 'And had the bishops shown more of the meekness proper to their calling they would not now be in the Tower for their foolish proclamation.'

He still held himself erect, though he was in feeble health and weary from standing. The King marked his fatigue, natural in one of his age, but his innate courtesy was stifled by his hatred of this man, and neither policy nor kindness moved him to bid John Pym be seated.

'We must discuss these things,' he said. 'I am willing to be reasonable, and you have the reputation of a moderate. But you have some fanatic fellows of your party. Mr. Pym—Holles, Haselrig, Hampden, and a certain Oliver Cromwell.'

'These gentlemen you name,' replied John Pym, 'are no more nor less fanatic than a hundred others, sire.'

'They have stood forth of late as notable in voicing certain daring opinions,' said the King, who, though he had himself carefully in hand, was not able to be more than barely civil. 'You must not think, Mr. Pym, that I have overlooked them.'

'What is the meaning of Your Majesty's reference to these gentlemen?'

'Only this,' replied Charles steadily, 'that you and I

could work together only if you refused your company and counsels to these I have mentioned—and some others, as my Lord Kimbolton, Mr. Strode, and the Earl of Essex.'

'They are all,' said Mr. Pym, 'as well able to advise Your Majesty as myself. And, sire, if you sincerely wish to please your people, you will entertain no prejudice against these men, for they are highly esteemed and trusted by all.'

'Enough, enough!' cried the King, in great agitation, hastily rising. 'I might consider terms with you, Mr. Pym, but not with every heretic whose voice is loud enough to catch the ear of the vulgar—but do not misunderstand me—you will hear from me again. To-day—to-day the sun sets and it groweth chilly.' He looked round the garden, now filled with sunset light, with an abstracted air. 'Think of me kindly, Mr. Pym, and tell the Commons their honour and safety is my chiefest care—as I hope theirs will be the welfare of the nation.'

'Our talk, then, hath no conclusion?' asked Mr. Pym, who augured little good from this abrupt dismissal.

'Not here,' said the King with a smile; 'at some further time, sir, you shall know the impression your speech to-day hath made on me. Now I must think a little on what you have said. A good night, Mr. Pym.'

The commoner bowed, and the King, blowing a little silver whistle which he carried, brought up an attendant whom he told to conduct Mr. Pym to the gates of the palace.

And so the interview from which Lord Falkland and the moderate royalists had hoped so much ended.

Charles, trembling with emotion, spurned with the light cane he carried the spot of earth on which John Pym had stood.

'Thou damnable Puritan!' he muttered, 'must I not only swallow thee but all thy brood of heretics! Too much, by Christ, too much!'

CHAPTER X

LORD FALKLAND'S ADVICE

HALF an hour later the Queen and Rupert found the King standing by the sundial; the sun had faded from the heavens, leaving them faintly purple, the trees were intertwining shapes, grey avenues of darkness, the scent of the violets by the dial was rich and strong, the air blew chilly, and in the palace windows the yellow lights were springing up, one by one.

The Queen in her dark careless garments and Rupert in his brilliant bravery alike gloomed up out of the twilight as indistinct shapes.

The King peered at them a little before he knew them.

'John Pym and I will never speak together more,' he said abruptly and in a hoarse tone. 'When I returned to London it was not with the purpose of winning these men but of punishing them, and to that purpose I adhere.'

'Lord Falkland,' answered Rupert, 'said Your Majesty had promised him to take no violent measures, and to consult him and your new advisers in all your actions.'

'Of late I have had to make many promises that are impossible for me to keep,' returned Charles gloomily. 'If men press on a king they must expect he will use all weapons against them. I shall act without my Lord Falkland's advice. How can he,' added the King with a grand air, 'or any man, know what I feel towards these men who threaten my sacred crown and God His Holy Church? Who imprison my bishops and take from me—my friends?' his voice broke into sadness. 'Truly, as I stood by this dial, I thought it was like an emblem of my life, all the sunny hours numbered and the finger now moving into darkness.'

'But to-morrow will see the sun again,' cried Rupert, 'and so Your Majesty, coming from an eclipse, shall behold a brighter day.'

'Alas,' answered Charles, 'the moon is misty and clouds and rain threaten for to-morrow. But though I

am encompassed with many dangers I will not hesitate to bring these traitors to judgment.'

'This is what I from the first advised,' said the Queen. 'When we came from Scotland, and the people were shouting and the city feasting us—then was the moment to strike.'

'It is not too late,' replied Charles.

'Take care it be not,' urged Henriette Marie. Last autumn half a day's delay ruined my Lord Strafford, so quick was this accursed Pym.'

'He shall be avenged,' cried the King in great agitation. 'This time I will strike first—keep it from my council. The King acts for the King, now. Come in, my dear love, our short winter day is over—I feel it cold.'

'A keen wind blows up the river,' said the Queen, with a little shudder. 'I saw the gulls to-day at Whitehall; that means a stormy winter.'

'But so far it hath been sweet as spring,' said Rupert, 'and there are so many flowerets out, that you might think it Eastertide.'

They returned to the palace, and the King had sent for Lord Falkland and was proceeding to his cabinet, when he was met by Lord Winchester, one of the most influential and ardent of his courtiers, a magnificent and wealthy Cavalier, a Romanist, and one greatly beloved by King and Queen.

'Sire,' said this gentleman in a low, hurried voice. 'I have just come from Westminster where there are some most horrid rumours abroad. I must acquaint you with——'

Charles looked at him in a startled and bewildered fashion.

'More ill news?' he murmured.

'Nay,' said the Marquess, 'it is but one of many rumours such as now for ever beat the air—but I have sounded several on the likely truth of this report, and do believe it to be more than an idle alarm.'

The King took his friend's arm and drew him into his cabinet where the wax-lights had already been lit and the fire sparkled between the gleaming brass andirons.'

'Dear lord, be concise and brief,' he said affectionately.

'I have summoned Lord Falkland, and he,' added Charles with his usual imprudence, 'is not in my confidence. I have taken him because I must. Now, thy news.'

The Marquess, who was as magnificent in appearance as he was in temperament, being in all things the great noble, the patron of the arts, the refined proud gentleman, the type of all that Charles most admired, began to pace the room as if in some perturbation of mind.

'I do not know how to frame the thing in words,' he began; ''tis about John Pym.'

'Ah, John Pym!' exclaimed Charles. He went to the fire and broke one of the flaming logs with the toe of his boot.

'It is soberly said and credibly received,' continued the Marquess, 'that this knavish fellow who hath such a marvellous hold on the minds of his party is preparing an impeachment of——'

My lord paused, and the King turned sharply from the fire.

'What friend of mine doth he strike at now?' he asked, in a tone of bitter anger and shame.

'It is said——'

'Thyself?'

'Nay, sire—should I for that have troubled you? It is said he meditates impeaching Her Most Sacred Majesty.'

'Oh, just God!' cried Charles, 'shall I endure this another hour, another minute?' He struck his breast with his open hand, and the rush of blood to his face showed even through the glow of the fire. 'Am I the King and cannot I protect my wife?'

'Among Pym's party the thing is denied,' said the Marquess, with an instinctive desire to be fair even to people so hateful to him as were the Puritans, 'but remembering how suddenly he struck before, and seeing how persistent the rumour was and how many held it credible, I thought it well to bring it before Your Majesty——'

'It needed but that!' exclaimed the King. 'Yet it needed not a further outrage. I had already decided on my course.'

He crossed suddenly to the Marquess and grasped him by the embroidered sleeves.

'Ever since Strafford died,' he said, struggling with violent emotion, 'I have vowed in my heart, by my crown and before God, that Pym and the Parliament should pay! And they shall—to the last drop of blood in their bodies! Let no one ask me for mercy for John Pym, for I would sooner lose my all than lose my vengeance on these rebellious heretics!'

'It were better to strike at once,' replied the Marquess, who well knew the King's habit of hesitation, and whose sympathies were with the more reckless counsels of the Queen. 'Nor wait until they have gathered strength and courage, or till fear giveth them daring. For I believe they have their suspicions that Your Majesty meaneth to punish them.'

'My lord,' replied Charles, 'you speak with wisdom. You shall not have long to wait. Let me but beguile my Lord Falkland, who is for a compromise with these fellows.'

He returned to the fireplace and stood there, shivering, and warming his hands, though not that he was cold; his features had a red, swollen look as if he had lately wept, and his eyes were heavy-lidded and bloodshot.

'My lord,' he said, 'come to me when Lord Falkland hath gone, and I shall have my project ready.'

Before the Marquess could answer, the King's page ushered in Lord Falkland.

The King stood silent, biting his forefinger as the young noble saluted him.

Not without misgiving did Lord Falkland see the Marquess in this closeness with the King. He knew him to be a man of honour and loyalty, but he knew him also to be one of those whose perverse and reckless advice the King most leant on—advice fatal to the peace of the kingdom, my lord thought, despairing of bringing Charles into an alliance with the Puritans when the great Romanist noble thus held his ear. The Marquess on his side regarded Lord Falkland as little better than a mild fanatic, and in his heart likened him, half bitterly, half humorously, to one who, at a bear baiting, should strive to separate

the furious animals by Christian reasoning when the stoutest stick made would be scarce sufficient.

So to the Marquess, who, though no statesman and no idealist, yet was shrewd enough in a worldly way, did Lord Falkland's attempt to make peace among the factions appear.

He took a half-laughing leave of the Viscount, and, kissing the King's hand, retired.

Charles picked up a small black leather portfolio from his bureau and began turning over the sketches it contained; they were Italian drawings recently brought by the Earl of Arundel from Rome, and the King glanced at them with real pleasure and relief. They were to his distracted mind what wine and gaiety would be to other men.

Lucius Carey, my Lord Falkland, with a look of anxiety on his beautiful face, waited for him to speak.

'Mr. Pym,' said Charles at length, gazing at a little drawing in bistre of a rocky landscape with trees, 'did make some discourse with me on the government of England.'

'Was his speech such as to please Your Majesty?' asked the Viscount eagerly.

'Please me?' repeated the King, keeping his voice steady, but the paper in his hand fluttering from the nervous shaking of his wrist. 'He wished to discuss matters with me as if we were two stewards set over an estate—not as if we were King and subject. Yet I do not doubt that he is a man of influence and one full of expedients and devices.'

'He is honest,' said my lord, 'and of great power, and it is most necessary that Your Majesty should consider him and his party.'

'Have I not,' asked the King with subdued violence, 'considered them?'

He put the drawing back in the portfolio and turned his sad, angry gaze on Lord Falkland.

'It is most necessary,' returned the Viscount, 'that Your Majesty should put aside all prejudice, and entertain the advices of these men with sincerity and openness. It is said at Westminster——'

‘Yea, it is said at Westminster!’ interrupted Charles, thinking of what the Marquess of Winchester had told him. ‘What is not said at Westminster?’

Lord Falkland was entirely ignorant of what the King referred to, and knew nothing of the designs imputed to Mr. Pym.

‘I referred to those floating whispers and alarming rumours which declare Your Majesty intendeth, and hath intended, ever since your coming from Scotland, some sudden and violent measures against the popular leaders.’

The King turned to his portfolio again and drew out a delicate pencil sketch of the Madonna and Child; the few strokes of lead glowed with all the sweetness and grace of the Umbrian School.

‘There is a lovely Raffaello, my lord,’ he said. ‘Who would not rather spend his time with these than with dusty politics?’

‘A King hath no choice, sire,’ answered the Viscount, who had himself left a wealthy cultured retirement at the call of patriotism.

‘No,’ said Charles, ‘there are many matters in which I have no choice. As to these reports you have heard, did I not lately promise the Commons that their safety was as much my care as that of my own children? And have I not promised you, my lord, and my other counsellors, to take no step without your advice? What more can you ask of your King?’

‘Nothing more,’ replied Lord Falkland. ‘If Your Majesty remain of that mind I believe there will be but little difficulty to bring all things to a happy conclusion. Only I know that there are certain rash perverse courtiers who would tempt Your Majesty to step outside the law.’

‘You have caught a republican tone from this Puritan party,’ said Charles haughtily. ‘How shall I keep within the law who am alone the law?’

Lord Falkland reddened at the rebuke, but answered the King manfully and earnestly.

‘Sire, if I am not honest with you, I lack in loyalty. The constitution of England is a mighty thing, and even

the King must respect it—even as you have promised. And if you go against it, and against the party and principles of Mr. Pym, there will be great store of unhappiness ahead of us all.'

Charles closed the portfolio and flung it down.

'I will do all things in reason,' he said, facing the Viscount, 'but I stand as fast by my faith as they by their heresies. I will not forsake the Church of England.'

Lord Falkland was silent.

'And they ask for the militia,' added Charles. 'They desire that the army for Ireland be in their hands, officered by their creatures.'

'Your Majesty,' suggested Falkland, 'might allow them the militia for a time.'

'No, by Christ!' cried Charles, 'not for an hour! You ask what was never asked of King before. Neither Church nor sword will I surrender.'

'Then the conference of Your Majesty with Mr. Pym hath been unavailing?' asked my lord mournfully.

'I do not say so much,' replied Charles. 'I have said I will not be unreasonable, nor regardless in any way of the good of the people. I will see Mr. Pym again.'

'Forgive me, sire,' said the Viscount, 'but a temperate carriage is advisable now in all things, to keep our friends, to gain others, and to render impossible the horrid chance of bloodshed.'

The King's eyes narrowed.

'They would fight, would they?' he answered. 'Well, so would I—I am not fearful of that. I should know how to meet rebellion.'

'Rebellion?' repeated Lord Falkland. 'I do not dare to use or think that word!'

'There are some who do,' said Charles dryly, 'but with God's grace we will avoid that danger. Are you satisfied, my lord?'

The Viscount bowed.

'I have Your Majesty's word for those measures we believe most necessary now. I am content to leave the rest in the hands of Your Majesty.'

In his heart, the Viscount, who had met much dis-

illusion and disappointment since he had joined the Court party, was far from satisfied. He found the King, as ever, vague, shifting, and reserved, and he was bound to conclude that the interview with John Pym had proved absolutely fruitless. Yet he drew some comfort from the fact that Charles had promised to commit no violence on any of the Members of the Commons nor to take any steps without the advice of his new counsellors—those moderate, loyal men of whom Falkland and Hyde were the chief, and whose mild and patriotic measures were entirely devoted to the task of making a settlement in the kingdom and mediating between Charles and the Parliament.

Charles seemed to notice the shade of sadness, perhaps of mistrust, on my lord's fair face, and he touched him lightly and kindly on the shoulder.

'Believe I shall act as becometh a King,' he said, smiling.

Lord Falkland kissed his sovereign's hand and withdrew, reassuring himself as best he might, and comforting himself with those fair visions of truth and concord that never failed to fill his idealistic mind.

Charles returned to the portfolio and continued to handle the drawings with a loving, delicate touch, and to gaze at them with the sensitive eyes of appreciation and knowledge.

He was so employed when my Lord Winchester returned. When the splendid Marquess entered, he put the sketches by.

'There is little satisfaction to be had from my Lord Falkland,' he remarked. 'He is little better than an ambassador of the Puritans.'

'What will Your Majesty do?' asked the Marquess eagerly.

'To-morrow,' replied Charles, 'there will be a few of these enemies of mine lodged in the Tower. To-morrow I impeach Pym and four of his creatures of high treason, at the Bar of the House of Lords.'

CHAPTER XI

THE FIVE MEMBERS

THE commotion at Westminster was intense ; never even at the arrest of Sir John Eliot or at the impeachment of the Earl of Strafford, or at the passing of the Great Remonstrance, had excitement run so high.

For the King, without acquainting his new advisers, in direct violation of his recent promises, to the astonishment and dismay of his friends, the rage and horror of his enemies, had made a move which put his legal position in the wrong and showed at once and for ever that alliance between him and the popular party was impossible. He had sent the Attorney-General to the Bar of the House of Lords to impeach Lord Kimbolton and five members of the Lower Chamber—Pym, Strode, Holles, Haselrig, and Hampden.

Immediately afterwards a guard was sent from Whitehall to arrest the five members. The Commons refused to deliver them, and sent a message to the King to say that the gentlemen charged were ready to answer any legal accusation. They also ordered the arrest of the officers who had been sent to search the rooms of the five members and seize and seal up their papers.

This was the answer of the House to the challenge cast down by the King, and all England thrilled to it ; all England waited too, in a kind of passionate suspense, the answer that would come from Whitehall. Was the King, who had so suddenly declared himself an enemy of the nation, baffled, checked or only further enraged ? What would he do next ?

Few slept that night of the 3rd of January ; and from thousands of Puritan households prayers and lamentations ascended.

It was now clear that not by gentle means could the people of England hope to regain their cherished liberty, and that neither consideration nor fair dealing was to be hoped from a King who had so contemptuously disregarded faith and the law.

Falkland, Culpeper, Hyde, and their following were utterly confounded and dismayed, ashamed and humiliated, but in the stern hearts of Pym, Hampden, Holles, Haselrig, Strode, and Cromwell was a certain exultation.

Their enemy (for so by now these men had come to regard the King) had put himself in the wrong, and alienated that vast mass of the nation which in all great crises long remains neutral, and which had, hitherto, declared for neither King nor Parliament.

But the recent action of the King, after his open promise before Parliament, caused the least reflective and humble of men to entertain a jealousy of their liberties, and a strong murmur of indignation arose over the whole country, which was a good help and encouragement to these men at Westminster.

Added to this satisfaction, the popular leaders, who had already dared so much and ventured so far, felt a deep, if stern, gratification, which was not, perhaps, shared by their followers, that affairs were coming at length to a conclusion. Charles had now raised the issue, and it was their task to answer his challenge as decisively as he had given it. Three at least of the Commons—Pym, Hampden, and Cromwell—did not shrink from the immense responsibilities which this involved on them, nor from the high stakes on which they had to play.

Pym and Hampden already stood as near to death as had Pym the year before, when Strafford had come glooming to Westminster to impeach him, for there could be little doubt of the King's intention to appease that proud blood of his forsaken minister by the blood of those who had sent him to his death.

Cromwell, one of a younger generation and of no such importance in the eyes of either King, his own party, or the nation, ran no such risk as his leaders and incurred no such responsibility. He was, however, their able and indefatigable lieutenant, and Pym at least thought highly of him as a driving force of courage and fortitude, enthusiasm and resolution.

On the morning of the 4th of January, the House met in an incredible state of tension and excitement, but during the morning hours nothing untoward occurred, and

the Commons adjourned at midday without there having been any sign or message from Whitehall.

Mr. Cromwell returned to the House early, as did most, and when Mr. Pym was in his place the benches were again crowded. Denzil Holles, Strode, Hampden, and Haselrig were near the entrance, talking earnestly with Lord Kimbolton, the Member of the House of Lords who had been impeached with them.

Mr. Cromwell looked at them with some admiration and even envy; they had a splendid chance to exercise all those qualities which he felt strongly burning in himself.

He rose up and made his way to Mr. Pym, who was sitting silent, and looked ill and fatigued. But his calm, resolute expression, the light of energy, command, and courage in his glance showed him to be, as always, the intrepid, prompt leader of men—the leader of wit and resource and vigour.

‘Any news yet to hand?’ asked Mr. Cromwell eagerly. ‘You have gathered nothing either in the lobbies or the streets?’

Mr. Pym smiled.

‘What is to be gathered but wild, bottomless rumours such as are to be looked for in these divided times? I have some of our own people posted near Whitehall that we may know as soon as possible the action of His Majesty.’

‘Maybe,’ said Mr. Cromwell, ‘he will do no more, finding his threats have failed.’

‘You do not know the King as well as I,’ returned John Pym. ‘He is the very haughtiest and most revengeful of men, and is not like to suffer in silence such an affront (for so he will call it) as hath been put on him.’

‘What, then, will he do?’ asked the Member for Cambridge. ‘What can he do?’

‘I have tried for many years,’ replied John Pym, ‘to work with His Majesty to form a ministry of loyal men proven by the Parliament—but it could never be, as you know—and all my dealings with the King, down to this last interview when I saw him face to face, have taught me his variableness, his unstability, his pride, and his insincerity. Therefore I cannot judge nor guess what he will do.’

The four members talking at the entrance had now returned to their places, and Oliver Cromwell hastened to meet his friend, Lord Kimbolton, who was about to leave for the Upper House. The Member for Cambridge accompanied him into the antechamber, and while they were there, talking on the one absorbing topic of the moment, a fellow with his face pinched by the wind and a little breathless, came up asking for Mr. Pym, and showing his credentials, was admitted into the Chamber.

Mr. Cromwell, taking a hasty leave of Lord Kimbolton, hurried back to his place in the House.

He found the Members already in a state of deep emotion and excitement, for the most momentous of news was flashing from mouth to mouth.

Mr. Pym's messenger had brought word that the King himself, accompanied by some hundreds of armed men, was riding down to Westminster. There was no time to lose; the royal party had been issuing from Whitehall gates when the man had seen them, and, though some little delay might be caused by the dense crowd thronging the street, it could not be long.

Deep cries of 'The city! safety in the city! To the river!' echoed through Westminster Hall, and the five members were pushed from their places by friendly hands and hurried from the Hall to the lobbies, from the lobbies to the Thames, and there into the first boat available with directions to hasten to the sanctuary of the city.

The thing was done with desperate swiftness, but if it had lacked this haste it would have been too late, for the House was scarcely returned to wonted order when the King with his cavalcade of ruffling Cavaliers arrived at Westminster.

A deep hush fell on the Chamber, as if every man held his breath. Mr. Cromwell leant forward in his seat, every line in his powerful face tense, like a great mastiff on the watch, entirely absorbed by the movements of his foe.

The King's men now filled Westminster Hall, and on the threshold of the inviolable Chamber itself the King appeared.

When he first saw these rows of hostile faces, darkened, silent countenances of men who had defied him and whom

he hated and scorned, he paused for a moment full in the doorway and calmly and deliberately gazed round him.

There was something awful in the moment ; the two opponents, King and Parliament, so suddenly and violently brought together, seemed like actors pausing before they enter on a tragedy.

The King, in rose-coloured cloth and a crimson cloak, great boots with gilt spurs, his hat in his left hand, and his right pressed to his heart, the bleak light of the wintry day falling over his fair head and melancholy face, looked a frail figure to be opposed to these gathered ranks of gentlemen who had the whole strength and feelings of a great nation behind them, while he was only armed with the intangible weapons of traditional authority and such virtue as he might find in the royal blood of his unfortunate race.

Beside him was his nephew, the young Elector Palatine, whose dark, haughty features expressed mingled curiosity and doubt. He had known exile and wandering, misfortunes and defeat, and it might be that he thought his uncle was daring those disasters which had broken his father's heart. His own presence there was an additional outrage on the Commons, but neither he nor Charles thought of this, so completely had they in common the family recklessness.

The two Princes, Charles slightly before his nephew, advanced down the floor of the House. Mr. Cromwell, turning in his seat, watched him ; there was a deep silence.

The King mounted the step of the chair and faced the Speaker ; his voice, very pleasant and slow as always, rose clearly through the crowded, still Chamber.

' Sir,' he said, ' we demand certain of your Members—Mr. Pym, Mr. Strode, Mr. Haselrig, Mr. John Hampden, and Mr. Denzel Holles.'

There was a second's pause, then the King added in a voice slightly varied and strained with anger—

' Where are these men ? '

' Your Majesty,' replied the Speaker, ' I have neither ears nor eyes in this place save as the House may be pleased to direct.'

A low, deep murmur followed these words, and the

blood ran up from the King's fair beard to his fair curls, and remained there, a fixed red in his haughty face.

'It is no matter,' he replied. 'I think my eyes are as good as another's.'

He turned and glanced round the House and scrutinized the packed benches in which were those five notable empty places ; through the open doors his own followers peered in with a show of pike and pistol. Oliver Cromwell looked at them and smiled. When the King's swift glance for one instant rested on him, that grim smile was still on his lips ; he turned and looked down full into the flushed face of the King.

Charles smiled also with a bitterness beyond words.

'I perceive that my birds are flown,' he said ; 'but I shall take my own course to find them.'

The Speaker neither moved nor spoke ; a few deep cries of 'Privilege !' rose from the benches, and the King seemed to suddenly lose that proud composure he had hitherto maintained. His painful colour deepened and his countenance was confused and troubled, as if he realized how many and powerful his enemies were and how completely he was now encompassed by them.

'Hold us excused that we thus disturb you,' he stammered, and he took his hand from his heart, where he had hitherto kept it, and caught his nephew by the arm as if to assure himself of the presence of one friend in the midst of this hostile assembly.

'God save you, sire !' muttered the Elector Palatine. 'Do not give these rogues the power of disconcerting you.' Charles replied something that was lost in the ever deepening and growing murmur from the benches, and, turning on his heel, passed with his usual dignity of carriage through the ranks of the angry and triumphant Commons, and joined his own followers in the lobby.

As the rose-coloured habit flashed out of sight, a great murmur arose, and the Members turned passionately one to the other. There was neither noise nor disorder ; they were the very flower of English gentlemen, nearly all of famous names and ancient lineage, and they had not acted lightly nor for a trivial cause, but with full gravity and weight and for the sake of civic liberty.

'His Majesty,' said Mr. Cromwell to his neighbour, 'is as great a blunderer as any I have ever seen.'

Further down the benches a member remarked—

'The die is cast. Now there is no turning back.'

The next day the Parliament moved into the city for safety, and there went into committee on the state of affairs in the kingdom. Mr. Cromwell moved the consideration of means to put the kingdom in a state of armed defence.

The King left Whitehall and sent his Queen from Dover to gain help from France, and to pledge the Crown jewels in Holland.

So was the die cast indeed, as all men began to see as the stormy spring merged into the stormy summer.

CHAPTER XII

NOTTINGHAM

'THIS is a day that will be remembered in the history of these times,' said the lady at the window.

Her brother made no answer, but continued to lace up his long riding gloves.

They were in an upper chamber of a house of the better sort in the town of Nottingham; the dark panelled walls, the dark floor and ceiling, the heavy furniture, with the fringes to the chairs and the worked covers to the table, showed vividly to the least detail in the strong afternoon rays of the August sun, which was, however, now and then obscured by heavy clouds which veiled the whole town in dun shadow and filled with gloom the apartment.

Both the lady and her brother were very young; but on her countenance was a melancholy, and on his a resolution, ill-suited to their years. The Cavalier was fair-haired, slight, grave, and arrayed in the garb of war, being armed on back and breast, and carrying pistols and a great sword.

The lady was dressed in a style of fantastical richness which well became her delicate and unusual appearance; she wore a riding habit and it was of pale violet cloth,

enriched with silver, and opening on a petticoat of deep-hued amber satin braided with a border of purple and scarlet ; at her wrists and over her collar hung deep bands of lace ; her hair was dressed in a multitude of little blonde curls which was like a net of gold silk wire about her face, and she wore a black hat crowned with many short ostrich feathers.

Her features were sensitive, well-shaped, and showed both wit and melancholy, her eyes were pale brown and languid-lidded, and her lips were compressed in a decided line which indicated courage and determination ; yet the prevailing impression she made was of great modesty and feminine tenderness.

At her breast, fastened with a knot of blue silk, was a long trail of yellow jasmine and a white rose.

‘ If I had been the Queen,’ she said, ‘ I would not have gone to France.’

‘ She went to gain succour, Margaret,’ returned Sir Charles Lucas.

‘ Another could have gone,’ insisted the lady, resting her dreamy eyes on her very lovely white hands which bore several curious pearl rings. ‘ If I had a lord and he was in the situation of His Blessed Majesty, I would not have left him, no, not for two worlds packed with joys.’

‘ The Queen went in April,’ replied the Cavalier, ‘ and then matters did not look to be past mending.’

‘ Yet, methinks,’ said Margaret Lucas, ‘ that any one might have perceived such a temper in the Roundheads that they would not easily see reason. And, dear Charles, the King had been defied at Hull—what was that but a portent of this ?’

‘ However,’ she added at once, ‘ it is not for me to speak so of my sovereign lady. Oh, Charles, what a heaviness and melancholy doth encumber my spirits ! See how the sky is also stormy and doth presage a tempest in the heavens, even as men’s actions hasten a tempest on earth.’

‘ Thine is not the only heart filled with foreboding to-day. Many eyes are already bitter with tears which shall be shed till their founts are dry before these troubles end,’ replied the young man. ‘ But it is not for us to lament the tearing asunder of England, but to remember

for which purpose we came hither from Colchester to pay our duty to the King, and renew our oaths of fealty before his banner which shall to-day be raised.'

Margaret Lucas came from the window; the brilliant light that streamed through the cracks in the storm-clouds made a dazzling gold of her hair, and slipped in lines of light down the rich silks and satins of her garments.

Glorified by this strong light, she went up to her brother and laid her hands lightly on his shoulders, turning him, with a gentle pressure, to face her and look down on her lesser height.

'Dear,' she said, 'dear and best—what shall come is hid by God, and no human eye may take a peep at it, yet we may make a guess that the times will be rough and disheartening, and thou wilt be thick in the midst of commotion. Yet whatever happen, remember thy loyal need, thy fair name; heed no chatter, but serve the King, under God, and keep a thought for all of us—and for Margaret, who hath no knight as thou hast yet no lady, have a sweet remembrance. God bless thee according to His will, Charles, and bring thee safely through these sad distresses.'

The young Cavalier, much moved, drew her two hands from his shoulders and kissed them, and she, gazing on him with much affection and something of a mother's look, kissed his bent head where the light hair waved apart.

Then, in a humour too solemn for speech, the two young loyalists (their faith was simple and admitted of no argument—to them the King could do no wrong) left the chamber and house, and mounting two well-kept horses and followed by a neat groom, rode through the streets of Nottingham towards the castle on the hill.

There were many people abroad, and several companies of shotmen, musketeers, and of armed citizens marching in the direction of the castle; but all were silent, and most, it seemed, sad, for an air of general gloom overhung the town, and there was no one to break it with rejoicing or shouting or any enthusiasm, and though those gathered within the town might be tenacious in their loyalty, they were either not confident enough or not exalted enough in their spirits to express it by any demonstration.

Margaret Lucas and her brother rode into the courtyard of the castle, where several companies of soldiers were gathered ; some brass guns and demi-culverins reflected the sun in blazes of light, and a band of drummers and trumpeters stood ready.

Sir Charles Lucas perceived that Prince Rupert was already there at the head of a company of finely-equipped gentlemen on horseback, and rode up to pay his respects, having already met the Prince. Margaret remained a little behind among the crowd of courtiers, ladies, and citizens.

Rupert's spirits were ablaze with excitement and satisfaction, he did not even seem to be aware of the general air of depression and apprehension. The King had promised him the command of the cavalry, the most important branch of the army, and to a Prince of his years and temperament, the glory of this was sufficient to obscure everything else.

' Good evening, Sir Charles ! ' he cried ; then his quick eye roved past the youth. ' Is not that lady your sister ? The likeness is great between you.'

' That is indeed Margaret Lucas,' replied her brother, ' who was visiting near this town, and nothing would satisfy her but joining me to-day in this ceremony.'

' I must speak to this loyal lady,' smiled the Prince.

He rode up to her and took off his hat, which was heavy with black plumes.

' Would you not know me, Mrs. Lucas,' he asked, ' that you would stay behind your brother ? '

' I would not be uncivil to any, least to a Prince,' replied the lady, ' but neither would I put my conversation on any man nor be so bold as to look at one unbidden.'

' This is a fair sweet loyalist,' said Rupert. ' Hast thou a cavalier beside the King ? '

She looked at him out of untroubled eyes ; his bold, hawk-like face, the black eyes, the white teeth flashing in a smile, the waving black hair, the dark complexion above the white collar, and all his attire of scarlet and buff and gold and trappings of war, his great horse, and the background of cannon, halberdiers, and stormy heavens, made a noble and splendid picture.

'I have no cavalier,' said Margaret Lucas calmly, 'nor have I yet seen the man to whom I could give my troth.'

'How many years hast thou?' asked Rupert.

'Highness—nineteen.'

He was little older himself, but he smiled at her as he would have smiled at a child.

'Give me your white rose,' he said; 'as thou art yet free, the gift harms none.'

Margaret turned to her brother.

'Charles, shall I?' and a faint smile touched her grave lips.

'With all heartiness,' replied Sir Charles.

She took the rose and jasmine from above her true heart, and her small hand laid them on the Prince's outstretched brown palm.

He raised that hand and kissed her glove, and her eyebrows lifted half-humorously under her golden fringe of curls.

'You are in good spirits, my lord,' she said. As Rupert, with clumsy carefulness, was fastening the two frail flowers in his doublet, the King rode into the courtyard, followed by the royal standard.

Charles rode a white horse and was wrapped in a dark blue mantle, an unnatural pallor disfigured his cheek, and an unnatural fire sparkled in his restless eyes; he seemed both melancholy and excited. He did not fail of his usual dignity, however, and though shut within himself in an inner gloom, he acknowledged readily the salutes that greeted him. There was but a scanty crowd, both of citizens and soldiers, nor was there much fervour save among the courtiers and personal friends of the King.

Charles glanced up at the wide, darkening sky across which the mighty clouds were marching, trailing fire in the west, then he turned to Prince Maurice, who rode at his side. 'When I was crowned,' he said, in a low voice. 'they did preach a sermon on this text—"Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life"—and unto death I will be faithful to God, the Church of England, and my rightful royal heritage.'

He then rode forward, and amid the music of the drums

and trumpets and the shouts of the spectators, the Royal Standard of England was raised and unfurled as sign and symbol that the King called on all loyal subjects for their service and duty.

Many of the citizens threw up their caps and called out, 'Long live King Charles and hang up the Round-heads!' but their cries soon ceased, and all gazed in a mournful silence at the great flag straining now at poles and ropes and flaunting the sunset with bravery of leopards and lilies and the rampant lion—crimson, gold, and blue.

It was the symbol of war—of civil war; when it broke on the evening, then was all hope of peace for ever gone. All argument, appeals to law, to reason, all legal dispute, all compromise, was over now; henceforth the sword would decide.

The sensitive soul of Margaret Lucas was touched by a dreadful grief; she bent on her saddle and wept. There was to her an almost unbearable sadness in the silent appeal of the lonely flag.

The King glanced half-wildly round the little knot of faithful friends gathered about him; a silence had fallen which none seemed ready to break.

Suddenly Charles put out his hand; a drop of rain splashed on the bare palm.

'The storm beginneth,' he said, and turned his horse's head towards the castle.

So they all went their several ways homeward in a wildness of wind and rain.

The Royal Standard faced the gusty tempests for six days, then the pole snapped and the storm hurled it in the dust.

PART II

THE MAN

‘A larger soul, I think, hath seldom dwelt in a house of clay.’—
A Contemporary on Oliver Cromwell.

CHAPTER I

A LEADER OF MEN

JOHN PYM was dead.
In June John Hampden had fallen in the fight at Chalgrove field, Lord Falkland had hurled himself on death in the front of the royalist ranks at Newbury, and now Pym, the bold and able leader, the dauntless spirit, the uncorrupted heart, had resigned the weight of his troublous years and rested in peace at London, where his body lay in state for good patriots to gaze on and mourn over before it was carried to the Abbey Church which held the nation's great dead.

To no man in the three rent kingdoms did the news of John Pym's death come with such force and menace as to Oliver Cromwell, now Colonel, and Governor of Ely.

When the Parliament had taken up arms in reply to the King's challenge at Nottingham, patriotic and energetic members had been given commands in the parliamentary army. Mr. Cromwell had raised a troop of his own in Cambridgeshire, had contributed out of his private means to the public service, had seized the magazine in Cambridge Castle, and forcibly prevented the University from sending its gold and silver plate to the King, and so, by boldness and expedition in all his actions, had justified the opinion held of him by his colleagues. He had been under fire at Winceby and Edgehill and in some other of the random

skirmishes which marked the beginning of the war, and he had shown himself quiet and tenacious in battle. He was now the soul of the Eastern Association, one of the foremost of the county leagues against the royal tyranny, Colonel of his own troop (now nearing close on a thousand men), and Governor of Ely, the town of his residence, where his family had remained during his service in London.

So the first turmoil and confusion of this most unhappy calling to arms had cast up Oliver Cromwell to a higher position than he could ever have thought of occupying in times of peace, and he had already had tumultuous experience of the bitternesses, difficulties, and bewilderments of one in authority during such momentous times.

To this man, in this situation, came the news of the death of John Pym, and he went privately to his chamber about the time they were lighting the candles and considered within himself.

The two leaders of the older generation, Hampden and Pym, were now gone, and who was there with sufficient courage and capacity, foresight and strength to take their place?

The moment was a critical one for the Parliament. The first rush of enthusiasm, the first outburst of fury against the King was over; a general lukewarmness overspread the adherents of the popular party, and the people, seeing that Parliament had now gotten the sword, were waiting for a speedy deliverance out of trouble, and finding themselves instead in the midst of a bloody civil war, were inclined to clamour for a peace, however hasty and patched up, especially as the tide of martial success had run in favour of the King, thanks largely to the generalship of his nephew Rupert, and many faint-hearted men were beginning to remember that they were incurring the risk of impeachment for high treason if the King should prove the final victor.

Those in the forefront of the parliamentary party were moderate men such as Essex, Warwick, Holles, Strode, Vane, and Manchester; the keen and fervent eye of Oliver Cromwell could see no successor to Hampden or Pym.

Again there came to him remembrances of the day at

St. Ives when he had received together absolute assurance that he was in Grace, and that the Lord had some uses for him. Did it not seem as if the path, at first so dim and obscured, was being opened out before him with greater and increasing clearness?

He could see the dangers that threatened the liberties of England, still struggling with, and not yet released from, their bonds, and he marvelled if God had put the means of quenching these dangers into his hands: *no other were there* now Pym was gone, perhaps it might be that he would be called.

There was Sir Harry Vane, with his knowledge of foreign countries and tongues, his pure heart and high courage, who had much of the mystic piety which pleased Oliver Cromwell. Yet he doubted if this man had the force and boldness to accomplish what must be accomplished now in England.

He paced up and down the room a little, then went to the window and looked out on the winter afternoon; the bare trees bent and shivered beneath the steady sweeps of the wind in St. Mary's churchyard near by, and the towers of the cathedral had a bleached and homelike look against a low, dark grey sky.

As he stood so, deep in his thoughts, he perceived, at first quite dully, but soon with interest, the solitary figure of a gentleman facing the wind in the chill street and coming towards his house.

Oliver Cromwell opened the leaded diamond pane and looked out; the pedestrian raised his hand to hold his hat against the wind, the beaver flapped back nevertheless, and the keen observer at the window recognized the Earl of Manchester, formerly that Lord Kimbolton who had been one of six members hurried from Westminster to the city, and now President of the Eastern Association and one of the most popular and influential men on the parliamentary side. Cromwell, however, had not that affection for him which he had formerly held; he suspected not my lord's loyalty, but his judgment, not his good intentions, but his strength of mind and purpose, and he saw in him a typical exponent of those evils and dangers his party had most to guard against.

With a sombre expression on his clouded features he descended the modest stairway of his simple home : the two-storied house had come to him, together with the office of tithe farmer, from his wife's uncle.

When he reached the hall he saw the slight figure of a girl lighting the lamp above the door ; she turned to him with the wax taper in the silver holder still in her hand and the pure flame of it lighting a face at once resolute and gentle.

The extreme plainness of her dark gown and white collar robbed her of the usual pleasant festive carelessness of youth, but her air of dignity and health and goodness was attractive enough, and she was not without distinction and a certain handsomeness of form and feature.

At the sight of his eldest daughter Colonel Cromwell's face softened wonderfully, and when he spoke his voice had a note of great tenderness which entirely dispelled the usual harshness.

' I did perceive Lord Manchester coming, Bridget,' he said. ' I pray thee set the candles in the little parlour. Is thy mother out ? '

' She hath taken Frances and Elisabeth for an airing, sir,' answered the girl. ' Mary remaineth with me. She will assay to help me with a tansy pudding.'

' The odour thereof is abroad already,' said Colonel Cromwell. ' Have we not tansy pudding overoften, Bridget ? '

A look of distress flushed the serene face of the young housekeeper.

' It is so difficult since the war began to vary the dishes,' she answered. ' All commodities are so high in price and so scarce.'

' I spoke lightly, dear,' interrupted her father hastily. ' Trouble not thy mind with this matter.'

A knock sounded. Bridget Cromwell opened the door and admitted Lord Manchester, curtsied with great simplicity, then turned into the parlour, bearing with her the frail light of the taper.

The two gentlemen followed her.

' You have heard that John Pym is dead ? ' asked my lord abruptly.

'But to-day, though it is a week ago. But the roads have been impossible.'

'It is,' said Lord Manchester, 'very rough marching in the fen country.'

'We have a great loss in Mr. Pym,' remarked Colonel Cromwell.

'Sir Harry Vane will take his place.'

'Umph! Sir Harry Vane!' muttered the other. 'A dreaming man.'

'A moderate man,' amended my lord.

'I begin,' cried Oliver Cromwell, 'to detest that word!'

Bridget had lit four plain candles which stood in copper sticks on the mantelpiece, and, kneeling down, put her taper to the twigs under the great logs on the hearth. The small room, which contained neither picture nor ornament, but which was solidly and comfortably furnished, was now fully revealed, as was the figure of the Earl in his buff gallooned with gold, armed with sword and pistol, with his soldier's cloak falling from his shoulders and his beaver in his hand.

Bridget blew out the taper, drew the red curtains over the window, then went to a great sideboard which ran half the length of the room, and was taking out a bell-mouthed glass and a silver tray when my lord interrupted her.

'Not for me, my child,' he said, with a smile. 'I am lodging in Ely for the night, and am merely here to have a few words with Colonel Cromwell.'

At this Bridget curtsied again and withdrew. As the door closed behind her Oliver Cromwell turned suddenly on his guest with such an expressive movement that my lord startled. But Cromwell said nothing.

'Sir,' remarked my lord, 'since last we met much hath changed. Things show well for the King.'

Colonel Cromwell did not speak.

'And I,' continued the Earl, 'am now very desirous to stop the war.'

The other took this statement quietly.

'You were ever for a compromise,' he said. 'Well, well,' he smiled. 'So you would stop the war? Not yet, my lord, not yet. When we lay down the sword the

King must be so defeated that he is glad to take our terms, otherwise why did we ever unsheath the sword ? ’

‘ Success lies so far with His Majesty,’ was the reply. ‘ Fairfax and Essex can hardly hold their own, Rupert hath proved a very genius, the Queen cometh from over seas with men and money—bethink you a little, Colonel Cromwell, if the King should defeat us ? Death for us all, aye, to our poorest followers, as traitors, and his own terms imposed on a bleeding nation ! ’

‘ He must not defeat us.’

‘ The chances are against us,’ said my lord uneasily.

‘ God,’ returned Colonel Cromwell, with indescribable force, reverence, and enthusiasm, ‘ is with us. Do you think He will give the victory unto the children of Belial ? ’

‘ Even if we gain the victory,’ persisted the Earl, ‘ the King is always the King.’

‘ My lord, if that is your temper, why did you ever take up arms ? ’

‘ For that cause in which I would lay them down—the cause of liberty.’

Oliver Cromwell went to the fire and stared down at the cracking logs, through which the thin flames spurted.

‘ These arguments whistle like the wind in an empty drum,’ he said. ‘ We must not think of peace until we have gained that for which we made war. Is the moment when the King is victorious the moment to ask his terms ? ’

‘ What instrument have we to defeat the King ? ’ demanded my lord.

‘ One can be forged,’ replied Oliver Cromwell. ‘ I do believe, as I told that very noble person, Mr. Hampden, that the King hath so far gained the advantage because the blood and breeding is in his ranks—as I said to my cousin, decayed serving men and tapsters will not fight like gentlemen—therefore if we have not as yet gentle blood, let us get the spirit of the Lord : faith will inspire as well as birth, my lord. I have now myself a lovely troop, honest men, clean livers, eager devourers of the Word, and had I ten times as many I would put them with great confidence against Rupert’s godless gentlemen.’

‘ Your troop is mostly fanatic, Anabaptist, Independent

—full of sermons and groans,’ said my lord. ‘Extreme men, by your leave, Colonel Cromwell, and full of religious disputations.’

‘Admit they be—they are all enthusiasts, they fight for God, not pay—as Charles’ gentlemen fight for loyalty, not pay—and, sir, I prefer them who know what they fight for, and love that they know, to any luke-warm hireling who will mutiny when his pence are in arrear.’

‘You yourself are an Independent,’ remarked the Earl dryly. ‘I had forgot.’

‘Sir, I belong to no sect; within the limits of the true faith I would let each man think as he would.’

‘So tolerant!’ cried my lord. ‘Then wherefore have you pulled the preacher from his pulpit in Ely Church?’

‘Because the Anglican rites are a mockery of the Lord,’ returned Cromwell, with fire. ‘And I would as soon have a Papist as a Prelatist—toleration with the true faith, I said, my lord.’

‘Who is to define the true faith?’ asked the Earl wearily. ‘I keep the Presbyterian doctrine which seemeth best to me, but you, methinks, would follow Roger Williams. Remember, sir, that you, as all of us,’ he added, with some malice, ‘must take this Covenant the Scots have put upon us as the price of their aid.’

‘That was John Pym’s work,’ answered Colonel Cromwell, in a slightly troubled manner. ‘His last work—’twas a galling condition, and at the time I blamed him; but, sir, we had to have the Scottish army, and as they would not give the army without we took the Covenant—well, Mr. Pym was a wise man, and he judged it best—and we have the Scots (for what they may be worth) marching to us instead of to the King.’

‘When you take up your appointment as my Lieutenant-General,’ insisted the Earl, ‘you, too, must take the Covenant.’

‘Any man may take it now Sir Harry Vane, that lovely soul, hath added his clause—that religion be reformed in England according to the Word of God; that covereth everything, I think, sir, the Word of God, not the dictates of the Scots!’

Lord Manchester looked at him in silence for an attentive moment, then spoke briskly.

'You follow Sir Harry Vane in religion, do you follow him in politics? Are you, too, a Republican?'

Oliver Cromwell looked at him quietly and frankly.

'I think a kingly government a good one,' he said, 'if the king be a just, wise man. Nay, I never was a Republican.'

'Remember we stand for *King* and Parliament,' remarked the Earl. 'I would not go too far—I would not overthrow the authority of His Majesty.'

'What care I what man holdeth authority in England as long as he is powerless to do her wrong,' replied Cromwell quietly. 'Sir, all I say is that the time hath not come for peace save it be offered by His Majesty. Now is still the misty morning when all is doubtful to our eyes; but presently the sun shall rise above the vapours, and we shall behold very clearly the things we have to do. The Lord will strengthen our hands and show us the way, and His enemies shall go down like a tottering wall and a broken hedge.'

The Earl moved about restlessly.

'You have great faith, Colonel Cromwell,' he said, half sad, half vexed.

The fire had now sprung up strongly and threw a vivid light over the figure of the Puritan soldier standing thoughtfully on his homely hearth.

'Have I not need of faith?' he asked, in an exalted voice. 'Aye, the shield of faith and the breastplate of righteousness and the sword of the spirit which is the Word of God! "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places!"'

The Earl made no reply; he was moved by the sincerity and force with which Colonel Cromwell spoke, but at the same time he was appalled by the prospect which a continuance of the war seemed to open up. He, like many others, was confused, bewildered, alarmed by the tremendous thing the Parliament had dared to do, and he wished to stop a crisis which was becoming immense and

overwhelming; he wished to keep the King and the Church in their ancient places, and he felt more or less vaguely that men such as Oliver Cromwell were aiming at a new order of things altogether.

Colonel Cromwell, on the other hand, was not confused by the thought of any future issues; he saw one thing, and that plainly: in the present struggle between the King and the Parliament, the Parliament must be victorious; then the future government of England might be decided, not before.

He felt that there was no longer much use for men like my Lord Manchester, able and popular as he was; the stern fanatics among his own arquebusiers who spent their time in minute disputes and arguments on matters of religious discipline were more to the liking of Oliver Cromwell.

The Earl rose to take his leave.

'I am at my ancient lodging,' he said. 'May I expect you to-morrow morning? There are some military points I would discuss with you.'

'Command me to your own convenience,' replied Colonel Cromwell.

'To-morrow, then.'

The two went into the hall, which was filled by the smell of the tansy pudding.

My lord asked after the eldest son of his host.

'He is very well, I thank you. He is at Newport Pagnell with my Lord St. John's troop of horse. Richard is still at Felsted, as is Henry; but I mean soon to take them from their schooling and put them in the army. Fairfax would take one in his lifeguards; Harrison, I think, another.'

'So soon!' exclaimed my lord. 'Their years are very tender.'

Colonel Cromwell smiled.

'But the times are very rough, and we must suit ourselves to the times.'

He opened the door; Ely showed bare and dreary beneath the darkening sky, from which a few flakes of snow were beginning to slowly fall. The two gentlemen touched hands and parted. As Colonel Cromwell still

stood at the door of his house, gazing thoughtfully at the winter evening as if he saw there some sign or character plain for his reading, his wife descended the stairs and, seeing him there, came to his side. She had a bunch of keys in her hand, and the light from the lamp above the door gleamed on them. Her docile eyes lifted to his ; her face had a look of stillness : she seemed a creature made for quietness.

‘ What had my lord to say ? ’ she asked.

‘ Peace ! peace ! ’ muttered her husband. ‘ He wanted peace ! ’

‘ And you ? ’ she ventured timidly.

‘ I ! ’ he answered. ‘ I live in Meshech and Kedar. I am in blackness and in the waste places ; but the Lord hath had exceeding mercy upon me—I have seen light in His Light—therefore am I confident in the hope I may serve Him. His will be done ! ’

Elisabeth Cromwell looked out at the dim white towers of the cathedral, where her first husband and her first-born lay buried, and she thought of that other child, Robert, who had died at school only three years before. Life seemed to her suddenly unreal. She closed the door and turned away.

Her husband followed her into the room on the right of the passage, where a fair group of children, Mary, Frances, and Elisabeth, were roasting chestnuts by the fire.

A maid was putting a white cloth on the table ; the pleasant clink of glasses and china mingled with the laughter and talk of Elisabeth, a beautiful child of some thirteen years, whose grace and gaiety was a sudden brightness in the Puritan household.

At her father’s entrance she came to him at once and showed him a round ball she had made of holly berries and hung by a red ribbon as an ornament to her wrist.

‘ Vanity ! ’ said Colonel Cromwell ; but as he kissed her his whole face was radiant with love.

CHAPTER II

THE QUEEN'S FAREWELL

IT was in the July following the winter when he had first come to discussion with my Lord Manchester that Oliver Cromwell, now the Earl's Lieutenant-General, flamed suddenly into great brilliance over England.

By his valour and skill he had turned the tide at Marston, after Manchester, Fairfax, and Leven had fled from the battle as lost; he had beaten Rupert's victorious horse with his own light cavalry, and he had led the Scottish infantry in an overwhelming charge against the enemy. The north of England was now lost to the King, the prestige of the parliamentary army had never stood higher, and Oliver Cromwell was become the foremost soldier in their ranks, both for fame and success.

Such were the results of the battle at Marston Moor; but Manchester appeared to be more frightened than encouraged at the victory. He almost refused to fight; his indecision lost the battle of Newbury; he allowed the King to relieve Donnington Castle; he would not go to the help of Essex, who was losing ground in the south; he and his Lieutenant-General had high altercations; the Scottish Presbyterian party proposed terms to the King, which Charles haughtily refused. After this failure they were somewhat quieter, though two of their leaders, Essex and Holles, endeavoured to bring an action against Cromwell as an incendiary; but Cromwell himself showed tact and moderation sufficient to bring about a peace between the various factions that constituted the parliamentary forces and in the autumn of that year was instrumental in the creation of the New Model Army—the instrument which he had long been burning to handle; the instrument by which the King, still haughty and defiant at Oxford, in which loyal city he had his own Parliament, was to be finally brought to accept and keep the people's terms.

Cromwell was excepted from the self-denying ordinance which ruled that no Members of Parliament were to bear commands in the army, and was created Lieutenant-

General and Commander of the Horse, Fairfax being General and Skippon Major-General.

Manchester and Essex retired with good sense and dignity.

Charles, moving from Oxford, stormed Leicester; Fairfax raised the siege of Oxford to dash after him, and on 14th June 1645 found himself face to face with the King's forces at Naseby, on the borders of Northamptonshire. A battle was now inevitable, and by both sides it was felt that it would be decisive: neither side could endure a great defeat, and either side would become almost completely master of England by a great victory at this juncture. Rupert was smarting to revenge himself for Marston; the King despised the New Model Army, and was eager to dash to pieces this new instrument of his enemies; Fairfax was ardent to justify the trust reposed in him. Both armies were impatient to bring matters to an issue, so on each side were motives sufficient for fierce inspiration.

The night after the armies had faced each other the King lay at Market Harborough, eight miles from the village of Naseby, where the parliamentary forces were encamped. He had his Queen with him and the infant Princess, recently born at Exeter, and was lodged in the modest country house of a certain loyal gentleman, a cadet of the noble house of Pawlet. Rupert rode up in the twilight from his quarters to see his uncle, and came into a peaceful, old walled garden, where Charles paced the daisied grass.

On a bench beneath a great cedar tree sat the pale Queen, the sun and shade flecked all over her white dress, her baby on her knee, and by her side her new lady, Margaret Lucas.

Prince Rupert came slowly over the lawn; his fringed leather breeches and Spanish boots were dusty, and his red cloak open on soiled buff and a torn scarf. He had a gloomy, reckless look, and his brow was frowning beneath the disordered black lovelocks.

Charles stopped when he saw his nephew coming and asked abruptly—

‘ They will fight to-morrow ? ’

'I think they will,' replied the Prince. He went up to the Queen and kissed her hand.

There was the dimness of many tears in that proud woman's eyes, and the delicacy of her beauty had turned to a haggard air of sickness ; she had, however, the swift, hawklike look of one whose courage is unbroken, and her pride was even more obviously shown now than in the days of her greatest splendour, when it had been cloaked with sweetness. Her worn, dark features, her careless dress and impatient glances, words, and movements were in great contrast to the careful splendour, the composed gravity, and the smooth youth of the blonde Margaret Lucas.

'Have you come to take His Majesty away from me ?' cried the Queen to Rupert as his lips touched her thin, cold hand.

'He did promise to inspect the army to-night, Madame,' returned Rupert, with a certain touch of indifference in his manner : Charles was no soldier, and the Prince had little deference for his opinion on military matters.

'And to-morrow there will be a battle,' said the Queen. She rose suddenly, clasping the sleeping child to her heart ; her ruined eyes regained, by the sparkle of tears, for one moment their lost brilliancy.

'Oh, Madame,' cried Margaret Lucas passionately, 'surely God will not permit His Majesty to be defeated !'

Rupert's dark countenance flashed into a smile as he glanced at her pale fervency.

'That cursed Cromwell is on his way to join Fairfax,' he remarked. 'Pray, Mrs. Lucas, that he doth not arrive in time.'

'Is he so terrible a man ?' asked the Queen scornfully : she could not endure to give even the compliment of fear to these rebels.

'A half-crazed fanatic or a very cunning hypocrite,' returned the Prince ; 'but an able fighter, on my soul, Madame !'

'His army consisteth of poor ignorant men,' cried Henriette Marie. 'Surely, surely gentlemen can prevail against them.'

'We will make the trial to-morrow, Madame,' said Rupert, with a flush on his swarthy face for the memory of Naseby. 'At least, we do not lack in loyalty—in endeavour—Your Majesty believeth that?'

'Yes, yes,' said the Queen hurriedly. 'Loyalty is common enough; but where shall we get good counsels? Are we wise to fight the rebels to-morrow? By all accounts they are double our number—and if this Cromwell cometh up with reinforcements——'

The King, who had hitherto stood silent, fingering the dark foliage on one of the lower sweeping branches of the cedar tree, now spoke with authority.

'We fight to-morrow, Mary. I mean to surprise their outposts.'

A pause of silence fell. The sunlight was slipping lower through the trees, and lay like flat gold on the lawn; the last brilliance of the day lay in the fair locks of Margaret Lucas, in the embroideries of her gown, in the swords of King and Prince, and over the frail figure of the undaunted Queen.

'I shall see Your Majesty at the camp after supper?' asked Rupert.

'Yes—sooner,' replied Charles.

The Queen looked keenly at the young man on whom so much depended in the issue of to-morrow, and seemed as if she was about to make some appeal or exhortation; but she turned away with a mere quiet farewell. The King followed her with a smile to his nephew.

Margaret Lucas remained under the great cedar tree and Rupert lingered.

'The white roses are again in bloom,' he said.

'When they next flourish may the King be safe in London again!' cried the lady.

'Amen,' said Rupert. 'Do you know the noble Marquess of Newcastle, Mrs. Lucas?' he added, with a smile.

A bright colour mounted to her alert face.

'I met him in Oxford,' she returned.

'I had your flowers in my Prayer Book in memory of that day we raised the Standard,' said the young Prince, 'and when my lord saw them, we being in chapel together,

he did ask of them, and when he heard their history begged them from me. Does this anger you ?'

'It is not becoming that Your Highness should tell me of it,' faltered Margaret Lucas.

'You are too modest,' smiled the Prince. 'He is a gallant lord and a valiant, loyal soldier. He asked me, if I saw you, to give you his homages.'

The lady stood silent, her eyes downcast, the quick blood coming and going in her noble face. Rupert waited.

'Have you no answer to the princely Marquess ?' he asked.

Margaret Lucas lifted her head.

'Tell him to—keep—the flowers,' she stammered.

With that she turned away as if she was frightened of having said too much ; the young General laughed a little and went back towards the house, whistling the air of a German song.

Margaret stood staring over her shoulder after him ; all the misfortunes of the State, of her own family, all the hideous sights and sad stories which had weighed her heart with black bitterness, the danger of her beloved brother, her own precarious situation—all these things were forgotten in one great flash of happiness.

She clasped her hands tightly.

'How I do love thee, thou excellent gentleman,' she murmured, 'even with an affection that is so beyond modesty and reason that if thou wert here I could avow it to thy face ! God protect thee, dear, loyal lord !'

The sun had now sunk behind the trees and hedges of the orchard ; the last bee had flown ; the roses gave forth their strength in a more intense perfume ; the sky changed to a sparkling violet, glimmering with rosy gold in the west.

The Queen called Margaret Lucas, and, putting the little Princess in her arms, bid her go and take the child to her women.

Margaret made her grave and humble obeisances and withdrew, holding the King's youngest born over a joyful heart.

'Mary,' said Charles, taking his wife's hand, 'if I fail to-morrow you will go to France. Promise me.'

'You must not fail,' she answered passionately. 'But

I give you this promise if it makes you fight with a lighter conscience.'

'A light conscience!' echoed the King. 'Methinks I shall never own a light conscience again.'

'You are too discouraged,' murmured the Queen, but with a kind of lassitude.

They went together into the house, and he told her of the arrangements he had made for her safe conduct to the coast in case of his defeat. She listened and made no reply.

They entered the sitting-room that opened on the garden, and the King closed the door, for he could hear some of his gentlemen without.

Henriette Marie seated herself on a worn leather couch and looked at her husband.

His face was pallid, his eyes heavy and shadowed, his hair damp about the brow; he continually put his hand above his eyes or above his heart.

'Last night I dreamt of Strafford,' he said suddenly.

'It was a dream!' answered the Queen. 'Is this a time to dwell on things unfortunate?'

He made no reply; he moved about the darkening room, aimlessly touching the furniture and the walls.

At last he stopped before the inert figure of his wife.

'Farewell, sweet,' he said. 'I have to join the Prince.'

'Farewell,' she murmured.

He moved towards the door and she sprang up.

'Oh,' she exclaimed, in a tone of horror, 'this may be our last meeting!'

Charles turned, startled.

'Dear God forbid!' he cried.

'If—the worst cometh—if I go to France—ah, when shall I again behold you?'

'Hast thou also evil premonitions?' asked the King, with a shudder.

She controlled herself.

'No,' she replied through stiff lips. 'No—no—but many thoughts press on my heart, and I am weak of late.'

Indeed, she felt all her limbs tremble, so that they would no longer support her, and she sat down on the couch again, cold from head to foot.

Charles stood beside her, gazing with the soul's deepest passion of love and anguish at her bowed dark head.

'Kiss me and go,' she said. 'What can I say? You know my whole heart. All hath been said between you and me. We have been surprised by misfortune, and I am something unprepared. But never doubt that I love thee wholly.'

The King again made that gesture of his hand, pressed first to his heart and then to his forehead, as if heart and head were equally wounded, then he went to a corner of the room where an old clavichord stood and lifted up the cover.

'Sing to me before I go, Mary,' he whispered.

The Queen rose heavily. Her bold spirit was bent with gloom; ill-health and the continual failure of the King's intrigues and the King's arms had given her a kind of disgust of life. As she had been more despotic than the King in prosperity, so she was more bitter and stern in adversity. As she crossed the window, open on the soft dimness of the garden, she thought, through her miserable languor, 'If, indeed, I never see him again, the scent of these roses will be with me all my life.'

'I will light the candles,' said Charles.

'No—no,' she answered. She seated herself and her hands touched the keys.

Her voice, once the pride of two courts and her greatest accomplishment, rose in a little French song; but tears and suffering had taken the clearness from her notes that once had rung so true.

At the end of the first verse she broke down and, putting her hands before her face, wept.

'I do love thee,' said the King, bending over her in a passion of tenderness. 'More than words can rehearse I do love thee, dear Mary, and have loved thee all my days. Be not confounded—it cannot be God's will to desert us utterly. Hold up your heart. Oh, I do love thee, or I had rather not have lived to see my present miseries—but thou hast made life worth while to me. My dear wife—my dear, dear wife.'

The Queen did not move, and her dry, difficult sobs did not cease.

'Oh, love that is so weak,' cried the King, 'that it cannot do more than this . . . to see thee thus . . . what greater misery could I have than to see thee thus.'

Still she did not speak. She had done much for him—crossed the seas and become a supplicant at her brother's court, sold her jewels, persuaded, inspired, and led many to join his standard, raised an army for his cause, been untiring and dauntless in her counsels, her energy, her confidence; but now a fatigue that was like despair was over her. She felt about him a fatality as if success was impossible for him, and all her ruined pride and splendour, her lost hopes, her lost endeavours crowded upon her till she could do nothing but weep.

Charles stooped and, with infinite gentleness, drew her hands from her face.

'This is a bad augury for me to-morrow,' he said.

She lifted her head then, the sobs still catching her throat. It was too dark for him to see her face, distorted by tears; only the dim white oval of it showed in the dusk.

'No bad auguries,' she said. 'No—to-morrow must see a turn in our miserable fortunes.'

He kissed her with a trembling reverence of devotion, and her tears dried on his cold cheek.

'Have confidence,' she murmured, her face pressed against his lace collar. She was always heartening him, firing his hesitation, directing his indecision, and the instinct of guiding and inspiring him came to her now even in her moment of weakness. 'Have no sad thoughts, no ill thoughts—God will fight for his anointed King. If I seem confounded, consider that I have been troubled with many things.'

He drew her gently towards the window, and they stood together looking out on to the garden. The white hawthorn and roses, the last lilac still showed pallid through the gloaming; the stars were beginning to sparkle in a sky from which the gold had faded, leaving it the colour of dead violets; the pure air was rich and sweet as honey.

'Whatever betide,' said the King, 'remember this—I will never forsake my children's heritage nor my faith.'

He had always scrupulously kept his promise never to discuss religion with his Papist Queen, and he did not

emphasize his resolve to remain for ever faithful to the Church of England. She knew this constancy of his and admired it, but now she said nothing of these matters.

'Whatever befall,' she replied, 'you are always the King.'

'I shall not forget it,' he said, with a kind of passion.

Another moment of silence passed, during which their thoughts burnt like fire in their hearts and brains, then he moved to go, stammering farewells.

Thrice he turned back to embrace her again, thrice her hands clung to him with a desperation almost beyond her control, while her lips tried to form in words what no words could say.

Then at length he was gone, and she heard the door shut.

'I will not watch him ride *away*,' she said to herself.

'I will wait and watch his return.'

Suddenly she thought of Lady Strafford and of the last time she had spoken with the Countess.

'O, God,' she cried, 'if I should never see Charles again!'

She turned to go after him, but controlled herself from this folly and stood huddled in the window watching the night moths flutter, shadows among shadows, and the chilly moon brighten from a wraith to gleaming silver among the whispering orchard trees.

She stood so until she heard the bugles that announced the King's departure, then she went to her prayers to supplicate the Madonna and the saints with bitter tears and bitter forebodings.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT FIGHT

THAT evening, while the King was reviewing his troops at Harborough and giving them the word for to-morrow—'Mary'—while General Sir Thomas Fairfax was holding a council at Naseby, Lieutenant-General Cromwell was hastening over the borders of Northamptonshire with six hundred men towards the headquarters of

the parliamentary army, which he reached about five in the morning under the light of a cloudless dawn.

At the entrance to the village he halted for an instant and surveyed with a keen eye the undulating open space of ground which rolled towards Guilsborough and Daventry : unfenced ground, full of rabbit holes and covered with short, sweet grass and flowers, above which the larks were singing.

The pure summer morning was full of gentle airs blowing from orchards and gardens and the scents of all fresh green things opening with the opening day.

Silent lay the hamlet of Naseby, the white thatched cottages, the two straggling streets, the old church with a copper ball glittering on the spire, all clearly outlined in the first fair unstained light of the sun.

Beyond lay the parliamentary army : a sober force with their pennons, flags, and colours already displayed among them, and the gold fire gleaming along their brass cannon.

Cromwell and his six hundred, dusty from the night's ride, swept, a flash of steel on leather, a tramp of hoofs, a cloud of dust, through Naseby, where the villagers crowded at windows and doors, not knowing whether to curse them or bless them, and so to the headquarters of General Sir Thomas Fairfax.

As the new-comers passed through the army and were recognized for Lieutenant-General Cromwell and his men, whom Rupert had, after Marston Moor, nicknamed ' Iron-sides,' the soldiers turned and shouted as with one voice, for it had lately been very commonly observed that where Cromwell went there was the blessing of God.

Sir Thomas Fairfax was already on horseback, and the two Generals met and saluted without dismounting.

Oliver Cromwell looked pale, and when he lifted his beaver the grey strands showed in his thick hair : the war had told on him. He had lost his second son and a nephew. His natural melancholy had been increased by this and by the bloody waste he had daily to witness, by the continual bitterness and horror of the struggle ; but the exaltation of his stern faith still showed in his expression, and he sat erect in his saddle, a massive figure solid as carved oak, in his buff and steel corselet.

General Fairfax was a different type of man, patriotic and honourable as his Lieutenant-General, but cultured, fond of letters, lukewarm in religion, and not given to extremes. Cromwell, however, found him more acceptable than Manchester or Essex.

'Sir,' cried the General, 'you are as welcome to me as water in a drought. Sir, I give to you the command of all the horse, and may you do the good service you did at Long Marston Moor.'

'We are but a company of poor ignorant men, General Fairfax,' replied Oliver Cromwell, 'and the malignants, I hear, make great scorn of us as a rabble that are to be taught a lesson. Yet I do smile out to God in praises, in assurance of victory, for He will, by things that are not, bring to naught things that are!'

'We have to-day a great task,' said Sir Thomas Fairfax, 'for if the King gaineth the victory he will press on to London—and once there he may regain his old standing; whereas if he faileth, he will never more, I think, be able to bring an army into the field.'

'Make no pause and have no misgiving, sir,' replied Cromwell. 'God hath put the sword into the hands of the Parliament for the punishment of evil-doers and the confusion of His enemies, and He will not forsake us. Sir, I will about the marshalling of the horse, for I do perceive that we are as yet not all gotten in order.'

The army indeed, though armed and mounted, was not yet arranged in any order of battle, and at this moment there came a message from one of the outposts that the King's forces, in good order, were marching from Harborough.

Fairfax with his staff galloped to a little eminence beyond some apple orchards that fenced in the broad graveyard of the church. By the aid of perspective glasses they could very clearly see the army of the King—the flower of the loyal gentlemen of England, the final effort and hope of Majesty (for this force was Charles' utmost, and all men knew it)—marching in good array and with a gallant show, foot and horse, from Harborough. The Royal Standard was borne before, and, they being not much over a mile away, Cromwell, through the glasses,

could discern a figure in a red montero, such as Fairfax wore, riding at the head of the cavalry.

' 'Tis Rupert, that son of Baal,' he muttered sternly. 'The false Arminian fighteth well—yet what availeth his prowess, when his end shall be that outer darkness where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth?'

Near by, higher than the old copper ball of the church, a tiny lark sang; the bees hovered in the thyme at their feet; the stainless blue of the heavens deepened with the strengthening day. A sudden sense of the peace and loveliness of the scene touched the sensitive heart of Sir Thomas Fairfax.

'English against English, on English land!' he cried. 'The pity of it! God grant that we do right!'

Cromwell turned in his saddle, his heavy brows drawn together.

'Dost thou doubt it?' he demanded. 'Art thou like the Laodicean, neither hot nor cold?'

'I think of England,' replied the General, 'and of what we destroy herein—fairness and tranquillity vanisheth from the land like breath from off a glass!'

Cromwell pointed his rough gauntleted hand towards the approaching royal forces.

'Dost thou believe,' he asked, 'that by leaving those in power we secure tranquillity and repose? I tell thee, every drop of blood shed to-day will be more potent to buy us peace than years of gentle argument.'

'Thou,' said Sir Thomas Fairfax, 'art a man of a determined nature—but I am something slow-footed. To our work now, sir, and may this bloody business come to a speedy issue!'

Cromwell rode with his own troop down the little hill-side to take up his position at the head of the cavalry on the right, the left wing being under Ireton, the infantry in the centre being under the command of Skippon, the Scotsman, the whole under the supervision of Fairfax. This deposition of the army was hastily come to, for there was not an instant to lose; indeed, the Parliamentarians had scarcely gained the top of the low ridge which ran between the hedges, dividing Naseby from Sulby and Clipston, when the King's army came into view across

Broadmoor, Rupert opposite Ireton, Langdale and his horse facing Cromwell and the Ironsides, Lord Astley in the centre, with the infantry and the King himself in armour riding in front.

Fairfax posted Okey's dragoons behind the bridges running to Sulby, and flung forward his foot to meet the advancing line of the royalist attack. The infantry discharged their pieces, and the first horrid sound of firing and thick stench of gunpowder disturbed the serene morning.

Then began the bloody and awful fight. Up and down the undulating ground English struggled with English, the colours rocked and dipped above the swaying lines of men, the demi-culverins and demi-sakers roared and smoked, the horse charged and wheeled and wheeled and charged again. The mounting sun shone on a confusion of steel and scarlet, sword and musket, spurt of fire and splash of blood, on many a grim face distorted with battle fury, on many a fair, youthful face sinking on to the trampled earth to rise no more, on many fair locks of loyal gentlemen, combed and dressed last night and now fallen in the bloody mire never to be tended or caressed again, on many a stern peasant or yeoman going fiercely out into eternity with his word of 'God with us!' on his stiffening lips.

Lord Astley swept back Skippon's first line on to the reserve. Rupert, hurling his horse through the sharp fire of Okey's dragoons, broke up Ireton's cavalry, and for all their stubborn fighting bore them back towards Naseby village. Uplifted swords, maddened horses, slipping, falling, staggering up again, the shouting, flushed Cavaliers, the bitter, silent Roundheads struggled together towards the hamlet and church. In the midst was always Rupert, hatless now, and notable for his black hair flying and his red cloak and his sword red up to the hilt.

Fairfax looked and saw his left wing shattered, his infantry overpressed and in confusion, the ignorant recruits giving ground, the officers in vain endeavouring to rally them, and his heart gave a sick swerve; he dashed to the right, where Cromwell was fighting Langdale, whose northern horsemen were scattered right and left before the terrible onslaught of the Ironsides.

As Cromwell, completely victorious, thundered back from this charge, he met his General. He did not need, however, Sir Thomas Fairfax to tell him how matters went; his keen eye saw through the battle smoke the colours of the infantry being beaten back into the reserve, and he rose up in his stirrups and waved on his men.

'God with us!' broke from the lips of the Puritans as their commander re-formed them.

'God with us!' shouted Cromwell.

One regiment he sent to pursue Langdale's flying host; the rest he wheeled round to the support of the foot.

Rupert had left the field in pursuit of Ireton; there was no one to withstand the charge of the Ironsides as they hurled themselves, sword in hand, into the centre of the battle.

A great cheer and shout arose from the almost overborne ranks of Fairfax and Skippon when they saw the cavalry dashing to their rescue, and a groan broke from Charles when he beheld his foot being cut down before the charge of the Parliamentarians.

He rode up and down like a man demented, crying through the storm and smoke—

'Where is Rupert? Is he not here to protect my loyal foot?'

But the Prince was plundering Fairfax's baggage at Naseby, and the infantry were left alone to face the Ironsides.

They faced about for their death with incredible courage, being now outnumbered one to two, forming again and again under the enemy's fire, closing up their ranks with silent resolution, one falling, another taking his place, mown down beneath the horses till their dead became more than the living, yet never faltering in their stubborn resolution.

One after another these English gentlemen, pikemen, and shotmen went down, slain by English hands, watering English earth with their blood, gasping out their lives on the rabbit holes and torn grass, swords, pikes, and muskets sinking from their hands, hideously wounded, defiled with blood and dirt, distorted with agony, dying without com-

plaint for the truth as they saw truth and loyalty as they conceived loyalty. One little phalanx resisted even the charge of the Ironsides, though attacked front and flank ; they did not break. As long as they had a shot they fired ; when their ammunition was finished they waited the charge of Fairfax with clubbed muskets. Their leader was a youth in his early summer with fair, uncovered head and a rich dress. He fell three times ; when he rose no more his troop continued their resistance until the last man was slain. Then the Ironsides swept across their bodies and charged the last remnant of the King's infantry.

Charles Stewart, watching with agony and dismay the loss of his foot and guns, rode from point to point of the bitter battle, vainly endeavouring to rally his broken forces.

Such as was left of Langdale's horse gathered round him, and at this point up came Rupert, flushed and breathless, his men exhausted from the pursuit and loaded with plunder.

'Thou art too late,' said the King sternly, pointing to the awful smoke-hung field. 'Hadst thou come sooner some loyal blood might have been saved.'

It was the sole reproach he made : he was past anger as he was past hope.

'God damn and the devil roast them !' cried Rupert, in a fury. 'But we will withstand them yet !'

With swiftness and skill he seconded the King's courageous efforts to rally the remnant of the horse, and these drew up for a final stand in front of the baggage wagons and carriages, where the camp followers shrieked and cowered.

For the third time Oliver Cromwell formed his cavalry, being now joined by Ireton, who, though wounded, had rallied the survivors of Rupert's pursuit, and now, in good order and accompanied by the shotmen and dragoons, advanced towards the remnants of the royal horse.

The King seemed like one heedless of his fate : his face was colourless and distorted, the drying tears stained his cheek. He looked over the hillocks scattered with the dead and dying who had fallen for him, and he muttered twice, through twitching lips—

‘ Broken, broken ! Lost, lost ! ’

The parliamentary dragoons commencing fire, Rupert headed his line for his usual reckless charge, and Charles, galloping to the front, was about to press straight on the enemy’s fire, where a group of Cavaliers rode up to him, and one of them, Lord Carnwath, swore fiercely and cried out—

‘ Will you go upon your death in an instant ? ’

The King turned his head and gave him a dazed look, whereon in a trice the Scots lord seized the King’s foam-flecked bridle, and turned about his horse.

‘ This was a fight for all in all, and it is lost ! ’ cried Charles.

Seeing the King turn from the battlefield, his cavalry turned about too as one man, and galloped after him on the spur, without waiting for the third charge of Cromwell’s Ironsides, who chased them through Harborough, from whence the Queen, on news of how the day was going, had an hour before fled, and along the Leicester road.

The regiments that remained took possession of the King’s baggage, his guns and wagons, his standards and colours, his carriages, including the royal coach, and made prisoner every man left alive on the field.

In the carriages were many ladies of quality, sickened and maddened, shrieking and desperate, who were seized and hurried away in their fine embroidered clothes and fallen hair—calling on the God who had deserted them—carried across the field strewn with their slain kinsmen to what rude place of safety might be devised.

Nor was any roughness exercised against them, for they were English and defenceless.

The Irish camp followers were neither English nor defenceless, even the most wretched tattered woman of them had a skean knife at her belt, and used it with yelling violence.

‘ What mercy for such as these, accursed of God and man—the same breed as those who rose and murdered the English in Ulster ? ’

‘ What of these vermin ? ’ asked an officer of Cromwell, when he galloped past in pursuit of the royalists.

'Is there not an ordinance against Papists?' was the answer, hurled harsh and rough through the turmoil. 'To the sword with the enemies of God!'

It was done.

Midday had not yet been reached; the whole awful fight had hardly occupied three hours, and now the King had fled with his broken troops, and from among the baggage wagons, the stuffs, the clothes, the food, the hasty tents, the Puritans drove into the open the wretched Irish women, wild creatures, full of a shrieking defiance and foul cursing, pitiful too in their rags and dirty finery, their impotence, their despair.

Some were young enough and fair enough, but smooth cheeks and bright eyes and white arms worked no enchantment here; sword and bullet made short shrift of them and their knives and curses.

'In the name of Christ!' cried one, clinging half-naked to an Ironside captain.

'In the name of Christ!' he repeated fiercely, and dispatched her with his own hand.

Then that too was over; the last woman's voice shrieking to saint and Madonna was quieted; the last huddled form had quivered into stillness on the profaned earth, the carbines were shouldered, the swords sheathed, and the Puritans turned back with their captured colours and standards, such plunder as could be met with, and the King's secret cabinet, recklessly left in his carriage, and full, as the first glance showed, of secret and fatal papers.

The dial on the church front at Naseby hamlet did not yet point to twelve; across the graves lay Ireton's men and Rupert's Cavaliers, their blood mingling in the daisied grass; the copper ball which had overlooked a day of another such sights beyond the sea, still gleamed against a cloudless sky, and above it, in the purer, upper air, the lark still poured forth his immutable song which the living were as deaf to as the dead.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEAD CAVALIER

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL CROMWELL pursued the King to within sight of Leicester, nine miles beyond Harborough, to which hamlet he returned with his troop towards the close of day.

The royalists, who had filled Harborough twenty-four hours before, were now scattered like dust before the wind ; the house where the King and Queen had stayed the previous night was deserted, and this Cromwell and some of his officers took possession of, as the most commodious in the place.

The church, after being despoiled of painting, carving, coloured glass, and altar, was used partly as a stable and partly as a prison for the few captives the Parliamentarians had with them.

Cromwell watched this work completed, then rode across the fragments of broken tombs and shattered glass, flung out of the church, to the house where Charles Stewart had taken farewell of his wife the day before.

The furniture the Queen had used was still in its place ; in the parlour where Cromwell entered with Ireton stood the clavichord open, as Henriette Marie had left it when she broke down over her French song ; a glove and a scarf belonging to Margaret Lucas lay on the couch, the windows were wide on the beautiful garden which again sent up sweet scents to the evening air.

Cromwell noticed none of these things ; he was not a man of exquisite senses ; perfume and flowers, green trees and sunshine were as little to him as they could be to any healthy man, and as for delights of man's making, he abhorred them all as vanities, from pictures and music, fine dwellings and costly gardens, to ruffles and fringed breeches.

Ireton was, if anything, a man even stiffer and more rigid in his ideas. They both sat down to their supper in the delicate little room which had been some one's home, without the least regard to their surroundings, either the

luxurious furniture or the fair garden giving forth sweets to the evening air.

Neither had changed their dusty, blood-stained leather and steel; Cromwell cast his beaver and gloves on to the satin couch, and Ireton flung his on to the polished floor.

A soldier brought in bread, meat, cheese, and beer from the inn; nothing more was to be had. Cromwell, who had not eaten since the night before, did not complain, but finished his food with a good appetite.

Though he had been twenty-four hours in the saddle, he was too strong a man to feel more than an ordinary weariness, and the exaltation of his spirits made him forget the slight fatigue of his body.

The two soldiers said little while they were eating, save to now and then make some remark on the number of the malignants slain or captured, or some ejaculations as to the might and power of the Lord who had now so signally demonstrated that His countenance was turned towards them.

Henry Ireton was a man after Cromwell's own heart, one of the choicest of that little band who had taken the place of the older patriots, such as Pym and Hampden. Blake and Sydney were two others; Sir Harry Vane, who was of my late Lord Falkland's temper, Cromwell considered less well suited to the times; Fairfax he had some doubts of; and Manchester, Essex, and their kind he regarded as little better than Laodiceans.

When he had finished his meal he pushed back his chair and regarded his companion fixedly. Ireton had taken off his corselet, bandoleer, and sword, and his left arm was bandaged; his extreme pallor and the drooping way he sat showed the severity of his wound, but it had not had power to dismay his spirit or to soften his stern bearing.

He was a man of five-and-thirty, well born and well favoured, his features showing resolution, enthusiasm, capacity, and courage.

'Hast thou no mind to take a wife?' asked Cromwell abruptly.

'It is not for me to be thinking of marriage when the land is in mourning,' replied Ireton. 'Even a wilder-

ness with the water-springs dried up and a fruitful land become barren.'

'Peace cometh soon,' said Cromwell grimly.

'Yet the King hath escaped into Oxford by now, and many places hold out against us,' returned Ireton.

'Be not as the children of Ephraim, but remember what the Lord hath done for us,' said Cromwell. 'I tell thee He shall this year make an end of His enemies, Papist, Prelatist, and Arminian, and all such as defy Him. Is not His hand truly visible amongst us? Surely it would be a very atheist to doubt it. And for what I was about to say, Harry, coming to a plainer matter, my daughter Bridget is marriageable and full of piety and fear of the Lord—a thrifty maiden and one well-exercised in household ways, and if thou hast a mind to this alliance we may celebrate a marriage with the peace.'

Ireton flushed with pleasure at this undoubted honour; for Oliver Cromwell had become already a considerable man, and after the splendour of to-day's achievements was like to become more considerable still; beside, Ireton held him in sincere respect and affection.

'Sir,' he replied, 'I am very sensible of this kindness, and if I on my part may satisfy what you shall demand of me, I will take a wife from thy hearth with as much joy as Jacob took Rachel.'

Oliver Cromwell's face softened into sudden tenderness.

'Thou *dost* satisfy me, Henry!' he answered. 'I have great and good hopes of thee. I know not why this came into my mind at this season, save that, seeing thee hurt and weary, methought a woman's care would not come ill.'

He rose abruptly, to cut short Ireton's further thanks, and, going to the door, called for candles.

Colonel Whalley and some other officers now entered, and after some further talk they left, Ireton with them, to see to the deposition of the new troops who, bringing prisoners and plunder, were continuing to pour into Harborough. Cromwell, left alone, called for ink and paper, and, seating himself anew at the table where the candles now stood among the tankards, plates, and knives, commenced his letter to the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Little of the tumult filling the village reached this quiet room ; outside the roses, lilacs, and lilies folded their parcels of sweets beneath the rising moon, and far off a nightingale was singing where the orchards dipped to a coppice, and the coppice dipped to the west.

Oliver Cromwell wrote—‘ Harborough, 14th June 1645.’ paused a minute, biting his quill and frowning at the candlelight, then briefly wrote the news of the great victory :—

‘ SIR,—Being commanded by you to this service, I think myself bound to acquaint you with the good hand of God towards you and us.

‘ We marched yesterday after the King, who went before us from Daventry to Harborough ; and quartered about six miles from him. This day we marched towards him.

‘ He drew out to meet us ; both armies engaged. We, after three hours’ fight very doubtful, at last routed his army ; killed and took about 5000, very many officers, but of what quality we yet know not.

‘ We also took about 200 carriages—all he had ; and all his guns, being 12 in number, whereof 2 were demi-cannon, 2 demi-culverins, and (I think) the rest sakers.

‘ We pursued the enemy from three miles short of Harborough to nine miles beyond, even to the sight of Leicester, whither the King fled.’

Having said all he could think of with regard to the actual battle that was of importance, Cromwell paused again and thoughtfully sharpened his quill.

Both the mystical and practical side of him wished to improve the opportunity. He had lately heard how the Presbyterian party at Westminster was very hot against the Independents, especially such as would not take the Covenant, calling them Anabaptists, Sectaries, and Schismatics ; and Cromwell, who was for liberty of conscience and toleration within Puritan bounds, and who was, if he was anything, an Independent himself and no lover of the Scots or their Covenant, wished to impress the Parliament with the worth of these despised sects, at the same time to magnify God for what He had done for them.

He wished also to give praise to Fairfax, who, under the Lord, he considered the author of this victory.

After labouring a little further in thought, he added this to his letter:—

‘ Sir, this is none other but the hand of God ; and to Him alone belongs the glory wherein none are to share with Him.

‘ The General served you with all faithfulness and honour ; and the best commendation I can give him is, that I dare say he attributes it all to God and would rather perish than assume to himself.

‘ Which is an honest and a thriving way, and yet as much for bravery may be given to him in this action as to a man.’

Having thus done justice to his General, the Puritan endeavoured to do justice to his soldiers, and to give a timely warning to the Presbyterians. He dipped his quill into the ink-dish and added, with a firm hand and a bent brow, frowning:—

‘ Honest men served you faithfully in this action. Sir, they are trusty ; I beseech you, in the name of God, not to discourage them.

‘ I wish this action may beget thankfulness and humility in all that are concerned in it.

‘ He that ventures his life for the liberty of his country, I wish he trust God for the liberty of his conscience, and you for the liberty he fights for.

‘ In this he rests, who is your most humble servant,

‘ OLIVER CROMWELL.’

As he dried and sealed up his letter, the soldier, whose ears, though deaf to the nightingale and the lift of the wind in the trees without, were keen enough for all practical sounds, heard a certain tumult or commotion which seemed to be in the house and almost at his very door.

With the instinct that the last few years had bred in him, he put his hand to his tuck sword and shifted it farther round his thigh, then, taking up the standing candlestick, he hastily crossed to the door and opened it. A little group of soldiers were gathered round the front

entrance to the house, which stood wide open, and Cromwell joined them, casting the rays of his two candles over a scene that had hitherto been illumined only by the pale trembling light of the rising moon.

A small, white, tired horse stood at the steps of the house, his head hanging down to his feet ; at his bridle was a woman, a dark scarf about her shoulders, the slack reins in her hand, and on his back hung a man who had fallen forward on his neck, almost, if not quite, unconscious.

The woman, with the moonlight on her face, was speaking to the soldiers in a tone at once imperious and desperate, and from all parts of the garden a mingled crowd was approaching to ascertain the cause of this supplication at the gate of the General's house.

Cromwell stepped with authority to the front ; the first flutter of the candlelight over the scene revealed to him that the man was desperately wounded and that the woman was wild with fear and anger, yet, by some fierce effort, keeping her composure. The look on her face reminded him of that he had seen on Lady Strafford's face when her coach was stopped by the mob in Whitehall.

'What is this ?' he asked.

'Sir,' replied one of the troopers, 'this is none other than one of those calves of Bethel who did so levant and flourish to-day.'

The lady now let go the reins and stepped forward, interrupting the soldier, and addressing herself directly to Cromwell, whom she perceived by his scarf and equipments to be an officer of some rank.

'Sir,' she said, with a dignity greater than her sorrow, and a pride stronger than her grief, 'this is my husband's brother's house.'

'Thy brother hath doubtless fled with the King,' returned Cromwell, 'and his house is now the property of the Parliament.'

'This is my husband,' said the lady ; 'he was in the battalia to-day—and I went down to the field and found him, and one helped me set him on a horse and so we came here—to my brother's house.'

Cromwell listened tenderly.

'Alas !' he said, 'thou art over young for such scenes.'

He gave the candlestick to one of the soldiers, and stepped into the garden.

The Cavalier, who was, by a desperate effort, holding on to his senses, now dragged himself upright and spoke—

‘Since the rebels have the house, ask them not—for charity,’ he muttered, and then, with the attempt at speech, fainted, and dropped sideways out of the saddle into the arms of one of the Roundheads.

At this sight the lady lost all pride, and, glancing wildly round the ring of steel-clad figures, she clasped her hands in a gesture of appeal.

‘May he not be taken into the house?’ she stammered. ‘Oh, good sirs, for pity!’

‘A malignant,’ said the corporal who had caught the Cavalier, pointing to his long locks and rich dress, ‘and one doubtless drunk with the blood of the saints! Shall I take him to the church, that plague spot of hierarchy, where the other children of Belial lie bound?’

‘Nay,’ replied Cromwell, ‘take up the young man and bring him into the house.’

He looked to the lady and added—

‘Madam, what is your name and quality?’

‘Sir,’ she replied, ‘my lord is Sir William Pawlet, of the House of the Marquis of Winchester, and I am Jane, his wife.’

The look of pity died from the Puritan’s expressive face.

‘He who holdeth Basing House against us? That Winchester?’ he cried grimly. ‘Art thou, as he, Papist?’

‘Your tongue doth call us that,’ she replied faintly.

‘Ha!’ cried Cromwell, ‘must I then succour the children of filth and abomination, the brood of the Scarlet Women, whose bones I have declared shall whiten the valley of Hinnom and whose dust I promised to cast into the brook of Kedar?’

The lady pressed to her husband’s side.

‘God’s will be done,’ she said in despair; ‘even in this pass I cannot deny my God nor my King.’

The two soldiers who had lifted the Cavalier paused with their burden, expecting that the General would order both Papists to a common prison.

And such, indeed, was for a moment his intention, for

no man was more hated by him than Lord Winchester, who had, since the beginning of the war, defied the Parliamentarians from Basing House.

But as he was about to speak he glanced down at the face of the unconscious man, and a shudder shook him.

On the young Cavalier's fair face was a dreadful look of his own son Oliver, who had died at Newport Pagnell, and of that nephew who had died in his arms after Marston Moor; and with these two memories came that of his first-born, Robert, dead in early youth, and the intolerable pain of that loss smote him afresh.

'Bring the youth into the house,' he said sombrely.

Lady Pawlet made no answer and gave no sign of gratitude; she followed the soldiers who were carrying her husband, and helped them to support his head.

'Surely the young man is dying,' said Oliver Cromwell gloomily. 'Bring him into the parlour and fetch a surgeon if one may be found. And look you, Gaveston,' he added to the sergeant, 'see this letter is dispatched to Mr. Lenthall, in London.'

The candles had now been replaced on the table, and the General took up his letter to the Speaker, but while he was addressing the soldier and handing him the dispatch, his frowning eyes were fixed on the Cavalier, who was now extended on the couch with his cloak for a pillow.

Lady Pawlet, as if despairing of better accommodation, perhaps too sunk in grief to notice anything, went on her knees by the side of her husband, and knelt there as still as he, holding his hand to her breast.

The black scarf had fallen back over her tumbled grey dress and soiled ruffles, and the red-gold of her disordered hair glittered round a face disfigured with fatigue and sorrow—a face that had once been fair enough and gay enough. They were both very young and scarcely past their bridal days.

Oliver Cromwell stood with his back to the table, the light behind him, watching them; she seemed forgetful of his presence.

Sir William was bleeding in the head and the arm; these at least were his visible hurts, probably he had other

wounds beneath his battle bravery of silk and bullion fringe, Spanish leather, and brocaded scarf.

His wife, bending over him still and helpless, as if she, too, was secretly wounded and dying of it, suddenly moved.

‘A priest,’ she whispered, ‘is there not a priest? I think he is—dying,’

‘Pray that the light may come to him in the little time left,’ said the Puritan sternly. ‘And seek not to seal his eternal damnation by idolatry and devilry.’

The lady looked up as if she had not heard what he said and did not know who he was.

‘Oh, sir,’ she said, ‘will you come and look at my lord?’

Cromwell stepped up to the couch and gazed down at the Cavalier; his features were pinched, the wound at the side of the head, from which the blood had ceased to flow, was of a purplish colour.

The General touched him on the brow, moving back the clotted curls, and gazed into his agonized features.

‘His heart—I cannot feel his heart,’ cried Lady Pawlet.

‘He is not here,’ said Cromwell. ‘Even as we speak, he standeth before the Judgment Seat.’

CHAPTER V

LIEUT.-GENERAL CROMWELL AND HIS GOD

‘WELL, well!’ stammered Lady Pawlet. ‘There are some shall answer to God for this. Well, well!’

‘Get to thy friends if thou hast any,’ said the Puritan, ‘and let them put thee beyond seas. There is an ordinance against Papists.’

She stared at him; the body of the dead Cavalier was between them; the red candlelight and the white moonlight mingled grotesquely over the dead and the living.

‘Ah yes,’ she said; her eyes wandered to her husband’s face. ‘The King will be sorry,’ she added.

‘The King,’ replied Cromwell, ‘hath troubles of his

own to mourn for. Up, mistress, and be going. This is no place for mourner and Papists. Tell me some friend's house and I will have thee conveyed thither.'

Lady Pawlet made no reply, and remained kneeling by the couch which held her husband.

Cromwell moved away abruptly; though professional insensibility and his hatred of the Papist checked the pity that was natural to him at any sight of distress, still his mystic, melancholy nature had been moved by the sight of the young man brought in dead. He thought he beheld in him a type of all the fair lives that had been ruined or lost since this war began—wasted men! And how many of them, one, two, or three thousand to-day, now being shovelled into the trenches at Broadmoor . . . all English like this one . . . all with some woman somewhere to weep for them. . . .

He turned again to the immobile woman.

'Come, madam, come, come,' he began, but his speech was broken by the entry of a soldier with some dispatches from Fairfax, who remained at Naseby, and with the statement that there was no surgeon conveniently to be brought.

'As for that,' returned Cromwell, 'the malignant is now in the hands of the Living God. But let that little white horse I saw be looked to. He turned to Lady Pawlet. 'He is mine by right of war, but I will give thee a fair price for him if he be thine, since we are ever in need of horses.'

She made no reply; Cromwell glanced at her frowningly.

'Gaveston,' he said, 'is there nought but this burnt ale in the house? Search for a glass of alicant for the malignant's wife, she hath neither strength to speak or move.'

'Methinks the King did take the fleshpots with him when he fled from this Egypt,' returned Gaveston. 'There is scarce enough in the village to refresh the outer men of the saints themselves—but I will see if I can find a bottle of sack or alicant, General Cromwell.'

Lady Pawlet, hitherto so immovable as to appear insensible, now suddenly rose to her feet, and, turning

so that she stood with her back to her husband's body, stared at the General who remained at the table, not two paces away from her.

'Art thou Oliver Cromwell?' she cried, with a force and energy that was so in contrast to her former despairing apathy that the two men were startled, and Cromwell turned as if to face an accuser.

'I am he,' he answered.

'Rebel and heretic!' cried the unfortunate lady. 'May the curse of England rest on thee! May all the blood that has been spilt, and all the tears shed for those thou hast slain, cry out to the throne of God for a bolt to strike thee down!'

'Fond creature,' replied Cromwell, 'I am in covenant with the Lord, and I do the Lord's work, and your blasphemies do but waste the air.'

'No! I am heard!' answered Lady Pawlet, to whom horror and wrath had given an exalted dignity and a desperate strength. 'Man of blood and disloyalty, a scourge upon this land, a bitterness and a terror to these unhappy people!'

'Shall I take her away?' asked Gaveston, advancing.

'Nay,' replied Cromwell, 'let her speak. Words no more than swords touch those who wear the armour of the Lord. As for thee, vain, unhappy one, go and wrestle with the evil errors that hold thee, and pray that light be given to thy eternal darkness.'

Lady Pawlet moved aside and pointed to her husband.

'He is dead,' she said. 'Only I know how good he was, how excellent and loyal—but he is dead in his early summer. And I, too, have lived my life.'

'“Man is a thing of nought, he passeth away like a shadow,”' returned the Lieutenant-General sombrely. 'We are but a little dust that the wind bloweth as it will.'

'A brazen face and an iron hand!' cried Lady Pawlet wildly. 'A wicked heart and a lying mouth! What has this unhappy England done that she cannot be delivered of thee?'

To the surprise of Sergeant Gaveston, Cromwell neither left the room nor ordered the removal of the frantic lady, but answered her earnestly, even passionately—

'Was it the Parliament first set up the standard of war? Nay, it was the King. Was it the Parliament that ever refused to come to an accommodation? Again the King. Was it the Parliament that roused the Highlands of Scotland to war? Nay, Montrose, the King's man. Was it the Parliament did command these horrid outrages in Ireland? Nay, Phelim O'Neil, the King's man. Therefore accuse us not of bloodshed, for we do but make a defence against violence and tyranny. We fight for God's people that they may have repose and blessing, and for this land that it may have liberty.'

'Thou to talk of God's people, heretic of heretic, who hast rejected even thine own deluded Church!'

'Ay, and the blue and brown of the Presbyter as well as the lawn sleeves of the Bishop,' cried Cromwell, pacing up and down in that agitation that often came on him when he was excited by any attack on his religious sincerity. 'If the prayer-book is but a mess of pottage, what is the preaching of the Covenanters but dry chips offered to the soul starving for spiritual manna? Men of all sects fight side by side in my ranks—would they could do so at Westminster.' He suddenly checked himself as he perceived that he was saying more than his place and dignity required, controlled the agitation that had hurried him into speech, and turned to Lady Pawlet, not without pity and tenderness—

'Gaveston, conduct this lady to Naseby where are the other gentlewomen taken to-day, and give her name and quality to Sir Thomas Fairfax. Take out the malignant and place him with his fellows in the trenches.'

At this the unhappy wife gave a shriek and hurled herself across the dead Cavalier, desperately clinging to his limp arms and pressing her bright head against his bloodied coat.

'My dear, they want to put you in the ground! I went to find you—you were alive; what has happened now? I found you; what has happened? They shall not take you away. Leave me,' as Gaveston tried to move her from the body; 'he is not dead.' She looked up and the tears were falling down her cheeks. 'I have nothing of him—no child. Would you take him away?'

'Leave them here,' said Cromwell. Since he had beheld his wife mourning her two eldest sons he could not bear to see a woman weep, and the young Cavalier had still that dreadful look of young Oliver. 'Send some woman from the village to her, and in the morning, when she is removed, you might bury him. Take my things upstairs—wait——' He broke open the packages and, holding them near the candlelight, looked over the contents.

'Nothing I need answer to-night,' he said, and glanced again at the slim figure of the young woman as she clung to her dead in her agony, the bright unbounded hair all that was left of beauty that had been so fresh and lovely.

'So is it with the ungodly,' he muttered sombrely. 'How suddenly do they perish, consume, and come to a fearful end! Even like a dream when one awaketh!'

So saying, he turned abruptly into the garden and walked away from the house.

The Puritan soldier passed through the garden without noticing the sleeping loveliness or reflecting on the desolation it soon would be: his mind was solely on his work, on what he had done, on what he must do—occupied with all the doubts and terrors of the struggle between the uplifted spirit and the still passionate human nature.

Outwardly he never faltered or hesitated, but inwardly all was often black and awful: a thousand perplexities assailed his strong understanding, a thousand different emotions warred in his warm and ardent heart.

Usually his spiritual enthusiasm went hand in hand with his physical courage and capacity, with his earthly feelings and hopes; but sometimes these jarred with each other, and then the old melancholy rolled over his soul.

When he had walked unheeding as far as the paling and was stopped there, by lack of a gate, he folded his arms on the fence and gazed ahead of him into the sweet night.

He was fatigued, yet far from the thought of sleep; the excitement of the battle and the pursuit, the thrill of victory was still with him. . . .

And yet . . . and yet . . . the dead face of Sir William Pawlet and the no less terrible countenance of his wife came before the soldier's vision. . . . And how many

thousands of these were there not now in England, how many homes deserted like this one, how many fugitives flying beyond seas, how many comely corpses being tumbled into the trenches dug among the rabbit burrows on Broadmoor? So many that the rolling hillocks would be all great graves, and for long years no man would be able to turn the earth there with a plough but he would disturb the mouldering dead.

What if he had to answer for this blood? Was not he the man who had always urged war—been the soul and inspiration of the conflict, so that the malignants turned and cursed him, even as Lady Pawlet had this very evening, believing him to be the foremost of their enemies?

‘Lord God,’ he cried out, grasping the fence with his strong hands, ‘I do not fight for gain or power, for pride or hot blood, but for Thy service, as Thou knowest! What am I but a worm in Thy sight, yet Thou hast given me success through Thy lovely mercy and made me a fear unto them who defy Thee! Hast Thou not declared that Thine enemies shall be scattered like the dust, and they who dwell in the wilderness kneel before Thee? Bring us that time, O Lord, bring Thy promised peace and scatter those who delight in war! For Thou hast said, “I will bring My people again as I did from Bashan, Mine own will I bring again, as I did sometime from the deep of the sea!”’

These words, which he spoke out loudly and in a strong voice, were wafted strangely over the sleeping copse, where even the nightingale was silent now; the sound of them seemed to be blown back again and to echo in his soul strongly even after his lips were silent.

He suddenly remembered when last he had rested against a fence; it was that November day outside St. Ives, when God had come to him as he walked his humble fields in obscurity and given him promise of grace.

His whole being shook with joy at the recollection; he put his hand to the cross of his sword, and as he touched the cold metal he again felt God stoop towards him, and saw the future and the labour of the future clear and blessed.

CHAPTER VI

THE KING DREAMS

THE Parliamentarians followed up the victory at Naseby with victories at Langport, Bridgewater, Sherborne, and Bath. The King was desolate at Newark, relying on Rupert, who held Bristol, that famous city, and had promised to stand siege for four months and more, and on the Marquess of Montrose, who had roused the gallant Highlanders to fight for their ancient line of kings, who had already been triumphant in many engagements, and was now marching to meet General Leslie. Cromwell's comrade-in-arms at Marston Moor, who had crossed the Tweed to crush the Scottish royalists.

It might seem that the reckless bravery of Rupert and the reckless loyalty of Montrose were poor props with which to support a crown ; but the King, unpractical in everything, dreamt that these two might save him yet, though his cause, since first he set his standard up at Nottingham, had never looked so desperate.

His private cabinet of papers which had been taken at Naseby had done him more harm than the defeat, for there were many documents, letters, and memoranda which proved to the victors the insincerity of his dealings with the Parliament, the sophistries of his arguments, the hollowness of his professions, and the unreliability of his word.

They proved also, if the Parliamentarians had cared to make the deduction, that Charles, however frivolous he might be, however unstable and changing, however much he had temporized and given way, was on some points adamant, and these points were his devotion to the Church of England, to his Crown and all its prerogatives, his unshaken belief in his own divine right, and the sacred justice of his cause.

Charles, indeed, had never meant to come to an honest understanding with Parliament, which he regarded as rebellious and traitorous. He might have played with it, cajoled it, lured it, deceived it ; but he had never intended to do more. Promises had been forced from him, but he

had always found some sophistry with which he consoled his conscience for breaking them ; concessions might have been forced from him, but he always meant, at the first opportunity, to withdraw. He would, if he had had the power, have replaced the Star Chamber to-morrow and treated the Puritans as they had been treated after the Hampton Conference in his father's time.

And he scarcely made a secret of the way he intended to treat the rebels if they were ever at his mercy. They embodied all that was hateful to him, and he had Strafford, Laud, and deep personal humiliations to avenge. He might sometimes talk of toleration, but there was none in his heart : his graceful exterior concealed a fanaticism as stern, as convinced, as unyielding as any that burnt beneath the rough leather of Cromwell's Independents.

In the autumn of the year of Naseby, so disastrous to his cause, he was in the besieged city of Newark, one of the few holding out for him ; he had, indeed, now only a few cities, such as Oxford, Bristol, Exeter, and Winchester, besides that in which he lay.

The Marquess of Newcastle, that faithful soldier and loyal subject, and many faithful Cavaliers and a small loyalist garrison were with him ; they were not under any immediate fear of an attack, because Fairfax and Cromwell were harrying Goring and Hopton in the south, and the Parliamentary force in the north was occupied with Montrose.

The Prince of Wales had followed his mother to the Hague and then to Paris ; the other sons, the Dukes of York and Gloucester, remained in St. James's Palace, together with the younger children. This safety of his wife and his heir gave the King a certain comfort and ease in his mind, and the long, idle autumn days did not pass unpleasantly in the beleaguered city for one whose delight was in dreams and repose and a retired leisure.

His soul was indeed sunk in melancholy, but it was a gentle sadness ; and the quiet of the moment, the sunny days in the old castle and garden did not fail to touch with peace a soul so sensitive to surroundings.

He told Lord Digby, my Lord of Bristol's son (that nobleman having fled to Paris), that if he could not live

like a king he could always die like a gentleman ; no one, not the most insulting, crop-eared ruffian of them all, could take that privilege from him. So, too, he wrote to the Queen in reply to her letters, which always advised uncompromising courses and exhorted him not to give way on any single point in reality, though she said it might be well to yield in appearance.

Charles needed no such advice ; he was calmly and patiently resolved to go to ruin on the question of Episcopacy and his divine right rather than yield a tittle, and this was not any the less true that few believed it of him. Almost the entire country, including the Parliamentary leaders, thought that now the King was cornered he would make terms : their only concern was to find guarantees to make him keep these terms when made.

To some, in whom he put perfect trust, the King revealed his mind. Thus he had written to Rupert at Bristol—‘ Speaking as a mere soldier or statesman, I must say that there is no probability but of my ruin.

‘ But, speaking as a Christian, I must tell you that God will not suffer rebels and traitors to prosper or this cause to be overthrown. And whatever personal punishment it shall please Him to inflict on me must not make me repine, much less give over this quarrel.

‘ Indeed, I cannot flatter myself with expectations of good success more than this, to end my days with honour and a good conscience, which obliges me to continue my endeavours, as not despairing that God may in due time avenge His own cause.

‘ Though I must avow to all my friends—that he who will stay with me at this time must expect and resolve either to die for a good cause or (which is worse) to live as miserable in maintaining it as the violence of insulting rebels can make it.’

As for the King’s future plans, they were vague, uncertain, and waited on events. Every General in arms for him—Rupert, Goring, Hapton, Montrose—fought on their own, with no other guidance than what their talents and circumstances might give them, and Charles might either join the one of them who was most successful or return to Oxford, which had been for nearly three years

his headquarters. He was not without hopes that the energies of the Queen might land another army in England, either Frenchmen supplied by her brother or Dutchmen sent by his son-in-law, the Prince of Orange.

He had some encouragement, too, to believe that the Scots, who disliked Independency almost as much as Prelacy, might yet be detached from their alliance with the Parliament. It was known that they did not love Cromwell nor he them, and the more that he gained in importance the more their ardour for the cause he represented cooled. It was said that they had even viewed the defeat of the malignants at Naseby with a cold and dubious eye, as they considered the discomfiture of the royalists quite balanced by the triumph of the Sectarists, Schismists, and Anabaptists who composed Cromwell's Ironsides.

Charles, therefore, nourished some fantastic hope that by deluding the Scots into thinking he would take the Covenant that was their shibboleth, he might altogether detach them from his enemies. It was a subtle and difficult piece of policy, and could only be accomplished by those intrigues which had so often damaged the King before ; but Charles dallied with the idea, while he waited for the news of a victory from Montrose which would put Scotland in a more submissive attitude.

The middle of September came, and there was no message from the Marquess. Charles soothed himself with memories of the Graeme's victories at Aberdeen, Perth, Inverlochy, and Kilsyth, and whiled away the time with reading, meditation, and the elegant companionship of the cultured and poetical Newcastle and the fantastical and brilliant Digby.

These two were with the King in the garden of the house, or castle, where he lodged in the afternoon of one lovely day when the sun sent a bloom of gold over the majestic scenery and glittered in the stately windings of the Trent.

The talk fell on the Marquess of Winchester, who had so long held Basing against the Parliament that the Cavaliers had come to call it Loyalty House and the Puritans to curse it as a cesspool of Satan or outpost of hell.

'I would that my noble lord was here,' said Charles, with feeling.

‘He doth better service to Your Majesty,’ returned Lord George Digby, ‘in defying the rebels from Basing House.’

‘But how long can he defy them?’ asked the King. ‘Can a mere mansion withstand the onslaughts of an army? Nay,’ he added, in a melancholy tone, stooping to pat the white boarhound which walked beside him, ‘my Lord Winchester will be ruined like all my friends, and Loyalty House will be but burnt walls blackened beneath the skies, even as so many others which have been besieged and beleaguered by the rebels.’

‘Speak words of good omen, sir,’ said Newcastle, who had himself staked (and lost, it seemed) the whole of a princely fortune on the royal cause. ‘Methought that to-day you did have a more cheerful spirit and a more uplifted heart.’

‘Alas!’ replied Charles. ‘I hope on this, on that, I trust in God, I believe that my own fate is in my own hands, and that I can make it dignified or mean as I will; but when I consider those who are ruined for me, then, I do confess, I have no strength but to weep and no desire but to mourn.’

‘Sir,’ said the Marquess, much moved, ‘Your Majesty’s misfortunes but endear you the more to us; and as for any inconveniences or losses we may have suffered, what are they compared to the joy of being of even a little service to your sacred cause? Sir, the rebels may wax strong and successful, but believe me there are still thousands of gentlemen in England who would gladly lay down their lives for you.’

‘I do believe it, Newcastle,’ answered the King affectionately, ‘and therefore I am sad that I must see those suffer whom I would protect and reward.’

They had now, in their leisurely walking, reached a portion of the garden laid out on some of the old disused fortifications of the castle, and looking towards the town.

The castle, which stood as an outpost to the town, was grimly fortified at the base, and the walls of Newark held cannon and soldiery; but none of this was visible to the three on the old ramparts. The scene was one of perfect peace, of that peculiar rich and tender beauty which seems

only possible to England, and which not even civil war had here been able to destroy.

The King seated himself on a bench which stood against one of the buttresses of the castle, the white dog gravely placed himself at his feet, while the two Cavaliers remained standing. The three figures, aristocratic, finely dressed, at once graceful and careless, well fitted the scene.

The King, though worn and haggard, was still a person eminently pleasing to the eye ; the Marquess, a little past the meridian of life, was yet notable for his splendid presence ; and Lord Digby, at once a philosopher and a courtier, set out a handsome appearance with rich clothes, both gorgeous and tasteful.

Charles, after being sunk for some minutes in contemplation of the prospect below him, turned to Newcastle with a smile both tender and whimsical.

'The Queen writes me, my lord,' he said, 'that there is a certain gentlewoman with her in Paris who often discourseth of your excellencies. Have you any knowledge of whom this lady can be ?'

The Marquess flushed at this unexpected allusion, and his right hand played nervously at his embroidered sword band.

'I only know one lady in Her Majesty's service,' he smiled, 'and she is scarce like to flatter me or any man, being most cold, most shy. Sir, it is Margaret Lucas, and I met her when she was attending the Queen at Oxford.'

'It is Margaret Lucas that I speak of,' replied Charles. 'Dear Marquess, I think her a very noble lady. Will you not write to her in Paris and console her exile ?'

The Marquess answered with a firm sadness—

'If Mrs. Lucas would accept of me I would take her for my wife. But these are not the times to think of such toys as courtships.'

'Ah, my lord,' said Charles earnestly, 'a true and loyal love shall console thee in any times. What adversity is there a faithful woman cannot soften ? Whatever be before thee, take, whilst thou may, this gentlewoman's love—thy sacrifices would not so vex my soul if I could see thee with a gentle wife.'

He sighed as he finished, his thoughts perhaps turning to the one deep passion of his own life—the Queen—now so far away and so divided from him by dangers and difficulties. When would he again behold her in her rich chamber singing at her spinet, with roses at her bosom, and her dark eyes flashing with love and joy? When again would he behold her among her court at Whitehall, honoured and obeyed? When again take her hand and look into her dear, dear face? . . . Were these days indeed over for ever, to be numbered now with dead things? . . .

He rose with a sharp exclamation under his breath: these reflections were indeed intolerable.

‘Ah,’ he said impatiently, ‘this dearth of news is bitter to the spirit. I sometimes think it would be well to gather my faithful remnant round me and make a sortie into Scotland to join my Lord Montrose.’

This was quite to the taste of the two noblemen, who were also tired of Newark, and Lord Digby, for whom no scheme was too fantastic, began to discourse on the advantages of the King’s sudden appearance in the Highlands.

But the mood of Charles quickly changed; his resignation and melancholy returned.

‘Nay,’ he said, ‘I must better the Scots by wits, not force. What would it avail to fall into the hands of the cunning Argyll and his Covenanters, and give the squinting Campbell the pleasure of making us prisoner?’

The Cavaliers were silent, and the three began to slowly continue their walk round the old ramparts.

‘Methinks this might be the garden of the Hesperides,’ said Newcastle presently. ‘See how bright the gilded light faileth, how gently move the dappled deer, and how softly all the little leaves quiver. And all the young clouds that come abroad are soft as a lady’s veil.’

‘It were good to die in such a place, at such an hour, if God gave us any choice,’ said Charles. ‘For one could think, in such a moment, that it was well to leave all sordid things and let the soul leap into the sunset sky as gladly as the body leapeth in cool water on a dusty day. But we must live and endure bloody times—and may the angels give us constancy!’

As he spoke he idly turned and saw, coming towards him, one of the gentlemen of his bedchamber.

He stood still.

'This is some news,' he said. 'Go forward, my lord,'—touching Lord Digby on the arm—'and ask.'

He had become notably pale, and he looked down at the roses on his shoes and put his hand to his side as the two gentlemen came up to him.

Momentous news had arrived at last: one of Rupert's troopers had brought a dispatch from that Prince, and within a few minutes of him had come a Captain of some Irish who had been with Montrose.

He brought no dispatch; he had made his way with danger, difficulty, and great delay from Scotland. His news was put in a few words, but they were words which Lord Digby could scarcely stammer to the pale King.

'There is news come, sir—that David Leslie——'

'A battle,' asked Charles, swiftly looking up. 'There hath been a battle?'

'Alas! Your Majesty must speak with this Captain of Irish yourself,' said the gentleman, in dismay. 'He saith Leslie fell on the noble Marquess near Selkirk, and did utterly defeat and overwhelm him; it was at Philiphaugh, sir—and all the Scottish clans were broken and the Marquess is fled.'

Newcastle gave an exclamation of bitter grief and rage. Charles stood silent a full minute, then said in a low voice—

'The Marquess is not taken?'

'Not that this Captain knoweth——'

'Then we have some mercy,' said the King, with a proud tenderness infinitely winning. 'My dear lord, what bitterness is thine to-day! Alas! Alas!'

Digby, with tears in his eyes, took the dispatch and gave it to the King, hoping that it might contain news that would soften the bitterness of Montrose's overthrow.

But for a while the King, struggling with his stinging disappointment and mortification, could not read, and when he did break the seals it was with a distracted air.

The very heading of the paper brought the hot blood to his pallid cheeks: it was not 'Bristol,' but 'Oxford.'

The Prince wrote laconically to say he had surrendered

Bristol to Fairfax and Cromwell, and had gone under parliamentary convoy to Oxford.

When the King had read the letter he stared round upon his gentlemen.

'Is this my sister's son,' he cried, with quivering lips, 'or a hireling Captain? Was this my own blood did this thing? Rupert whom I trusted?'

None of them dare speak. Charles was so white that they feared that he would fall in a fit or swoon.

'My city, my loyal city!' he muttered; then he cast the Prince's letter on to the grass, as if it soiled his fingers, and turned slowly away. He had the look of a broken man.

CHAPTER VII

LOYALTY HOUSE

SOON after Bristol surrendered, Winchester, that other loyal city, fell. Leicester, so lately taken from the Parliament, was by them recaptured soon after Naseby. Nearly twenty fortified houses had been taken this year. Goring's troopers were dispersed. Rupert and his brother had, in spite of all denials, followed the King to Newark: Rupert in high disgrace, deprived of his commissions, and ordered abroad, yet staying and endeavouring to justify himself to his outraged kinsman, succeeding somewhat, yet still in the unhappy King's deep displeasure, and hardly any longer to be considered as His Majesty's Commander of Horse, whether or no he held a commission, since His Majesty had no longer an army for any one to general.

In Scotland Montrose had fled to the Orkneys. Argyll and the Conventiclers were triumphant and biding their chance to make a bargain either with King or Independents, according as circumstances might shape themselves, or as either party might be ready to take the Covenant.

What, indeed, could the King hope for now but for some division among his enemies, or that the shadowy army of Dutch, Lorrainers, or Frenchmen should at last materialize and descend upon the coasts of Britain.

Ireland, in a welter of bloody confusion, was a broken reed to lean on. Ormonde, working loyally there, had too many odds against him, and was no more to be relied on than Montrose, who had paid a bitter price for his loyalty and his gallant daring.

It was in the October of this year which had meant such bitter ruin to the King's party that the Lieutenant-General of the parliamentary army, returning from the capture of Winchester, set his face towards Hampshire, where, at Basingstoke, stood Basing House, the mansion of the King's friend, the Marquess of Winchester, which had stood siege for four years, and was a standing defiance and menace to the Parliamentarians and a great hindrance to the trade of London with the West, for the Cavaliers would make sorties on all who came or went and capture all provisions which were taken past.

Cromwell had at first intended to storm Dennington Castle at Newbury, another fortified residence which had long annoyed the Puritans; but Fairfax decided otherwise, believing that nothing could so hearten and encourage the Parliament as the capture of that redoubtable stronghold, Basing House.

Accordingly, Cromwell, gathering together all the available artillery, turned in good earnest towards Basing, from whence so many had fallen back discomfited.

'But now the Lord is with us,' said General Cromwell. 'We have smitten the Amalekite at Bristol and Winchester, and shall he continue to defy us at Basing? Rather shall they and theirs be offered up as a sweet-smelling sacrifice to the Lord.'

It was in the middle of the night of 13th October that the Parliamentarians surrounded Basing House.

Then, while the batteries were being placed and Dalbier, the Dutchman from whom Cromwell had first learnt the rudiments of the art of war, Colonel Pickering, Sir Hardress Waller, and Colonel Montague were taking up their positions, the Lieutenant-General, who had already been in prayer for much of the night, gave out to his brigade that he rested on the 115th Psalm, considering that those they were about to fight were of the Old Serpent brood, to be fallen upon and slain even as Cosbi and Timri were slain

by Phineas—to be put to the sword even as Samuel put Agag to the sword.

All night the great lordly House, which had so long stood unscathed, had been silent among its courts, lights showing at the windows and above the Stewart standard floating lazily in the night breeze. There were two buildings—the Old House, which had stood, the seat of the Romanist Pawlets, for three hundred years, a fine and splendid mansion, turreted and towered after the manner of the Middle Ages, and before that the New House, built by later descendants of this magnificent family in the modern style of princely show and comfort, both surrounded by fortifications and works, a mile in circumference, and well armed with pieces of cannon.

As the sun strengthened above the autumn landscape, the steel of morion and breastplate could be discerned on the ramparts and the colour of an officer's cloak as he went from post to post giving orders: these were the only signs that the besieged were aware of the great number and near approach of the Parliamentarians.

Soon after six, the dawnlight now being steady, and the attacking parties being set in order—Dalbier near the Grange, next him Sir Hardress Waller and Montague, and on his left Colonel Pickering—the agreed-upon signal, the firing of four of the cannon, being given, the Lieutenant-General and his regiments stormed Basing House.

A quick fire was instantly returned, and the steel morions and coloured cloaks might be seen hastening hither and thither upon the walls and works, and a certain shout of defiance arose from them (it was known that they made a boast of having so often foiled the rebels as they termed them, and that they believed this bit of ground would defy them even when great cities fell), which the Puritans replied to not at all, but directed a full and incessant fire, as much as two hundred shots at a time at a given point in the wall, which, unable to withstand so fierce an attack, fell in, and allowed Sir Hardress Waller to lead his men through the breach and right on the great culverins of the Cavaliers, which were set about their court guard. They, however, with extraordinary courage and resolution, beat back the invader and recovered their cannon;

but, Colonel Montague, coming up, they were overpowered again by sheer numbers, and the Puritans flowed across the works to the New House, bringing with them their scaling ladders. There was another bitter and desperate struggle, the Cavaliers sallying out and only yielding the bloodstained ground inch by inch as they were driven back by the point of the pike on the nozzle of the musket.

Dalbier and Cromwell in person had now stormed at another point; the air was horrid with fire-balls, the whiz of bullets, the rank smoke of the cannon, the shrieks and cries that began to issue from the New House at the very walls of which the fight was now expending its force, like waves of the sea dashed against a great rock.

Not once, nor twice, but again and again did the stout-hearted defenders, in all their pomp of velvet and silk, plume and steel, repulse their foes; again and again the colours of my Lord Marquess, bearing his own motto, '*Aymer loyaulte*,' and a Latin one taken from King Charles' coronation money, '*Donec pax redeat terris*,' surged forth into the thickest of the combat, were borne back, and then struggled forward, tattered and stained with smoke.

But the hour of Loyalty House had come; the proud and dauntless Cavalier, whose loyalty had endured foul as well as fair weather, had now come to the end of his resistance to his master's enemies.

Nothing human could long withstand the rush forward of the Ironsides.

Colonel Pickering passed through the New House and got to the very gate of the Old House.

Seeing his defences so utterly broken down and his first rampart and mansion gone, the desperate Marquess was wishful to summon a parley, and sent an officer to wave a white cravat from one of the turrets with that purpose.

But the Puritans would listen to no parley.

'No dealings with this nest of Popery!' cried Colonel Pickering, whose zeal was further inflamed by the sight of a popish priest who was admonishing and encouraging the besieged.

After this the Cavaliers fell to it again with the sword, keeping up an incredible resistance, and all the works and

the courtyards, the fair gardens, walks, orchards, and enclosed lands, the pleasancess and alleys laid out by my lord with great taste after the French model were one bloody waste of destruction ; sword smiting sword, gun replying to gun, men pressing forward, being borne back, calling on their God, sinking to their death, trampled under foot ; the air all murky with smoke, the lovely garden torn up and in part burning from fire-balls, the wall of the noble House pierced by cannon-shot, the shrieks of women and the curses of men uprising, the colours of my lord ever bravely aloft until he who held them sank down in the press with a sigh, while his life ran out from many wounds, and the banner of loyalty was snatched by a trooper of Pickering's and flaunted in triumph above the advancing Parliamentarians.

At this sight a deep moan burst from the House and dolorous cries issued from every window, as if the great mansion was alive and lamented its fate pressing so near.

Lieutenant-General Cromwell was now at the very gates of the inner house, and these were, without much ado, burst open. The Cavaliers, pressed upon by multitudes and broken at the sword's point, fell back, mostly dying men, in the great hall ; and on the great staircase were some, notably my Lord Marquess himself, who still made a hot resistance, as men who had nothing but death before them and meant to spend the little while left them in action.

From the upper floors might be heard the running to and fro of women and servants, the calling of directions, and the gasping of prayers, while from without the cannon still rattled and smoke and fire belched through the broken walls.

At last, my lord being driven up into his own chambers, and those about him slain, Major Harrison sprang to the first landing and called upon all to surrender ; upon which eight or nine gentlewomen, wives of the officers, came running forth together and were made prisoners.

Major Harrison pushed into the nearest chamber, which was most magnificently hung with tapestries and furnished in oak and Spanish leather—a great spacious room with

candlesticks of gold and lamps of crystal, brocaded cushions, and Eastern carpets—and there stood three people, one Major Cuffe, a notable Papist, one Robinson, a player of my lord's, and a gentlewoman, the daughter of Doctor Griffiths, who was in attendance on the garrison.

These three stood together warily, watching the door, and when the godly Harrison and his troopers burst in they drew a little together, the soldier before the others. Harrison called on him curtly to surrender, and named him popish dog, at which the Cavalier came at him with a tuck sword that was broken in the blade, and with this poor weapon defended those who were weaponless.

But Harrison gave him sundry sore cuts that disarmed him, and, his blood running out on the waxed floor, he slipped in it and so fell, and was slain by Harrison's own sword through the point of his cuirass at the armpit.

Thereupon they called on the play-actor and the lady to surrender. She made no reply at all, but stared at the haggled corpse of Major Cuffe, twisting her hands in her flowered laycock apron.

And the player put a chair in front of him and turned a mocking eye upon the Puritans.

'I have had my jest of you many a time,' he said, 'and if I had lived I had jested still—but I choose rather to die with those who maintained me——'

Here Harrison interrupted.

'This is no gentleman, but a lewd fellow of Drury Lane.'

He was dragged from behind the chair.

'I have been in many a comedy,' he cried, 'but now I play my own tragedy!'

Him they dispatched with a double-edged sword, and cast him down; he fell without a groan, yet strangely murmured, 'Amen.'

Major Harrison, with his bloody weapon in his hand, swept across the chamber through the farther entrance into the next, and his soldiers after him.

Mrs. Griffiths now woke from her stupor of dismay and rushed from one body to another as they lay yet warm at her feet.

And when she found that they who had lately been speaking to her were hideously dead, and her hands all

blooded with the touching of them, she turned and cursed the soldiery in her agony.

‘ Silence ! thou railing woman ! ’ one of them cried.

She seized one of the empty pistols from the window-seat and struck at the man.

‘ God’s Mother avenge us ! ’ she shrieked.

The fellow, still in the heat of slaughter, hurled her down.

‘ Spawn of the scarlet woman ! ’ he exclaimed.

She got up to her knees, her head-dress fallen and her face deformed.

‘ Thrice damned heretic ! ’ she said. ‘ Thou shalt be thrust into the deepest pit——’

‘ Stop her mouth ! ’ cried another, coming up ; he gave her an ugly name, and hit her with his arquebus.

She fell down again, but continued her reproaches and railing, till they made an end, one firing a pistol at her at close range, the ball thereof mercifully killing her, so that she lay prone with her two companions.

After this the soldiers joined Major Harrison, whom they found with Lieutenant-General Cromwell at the end of this noble suite of apartments, having there at last brought to bay the indomitable lord of this famous and wealthy mansion, the puissant prince, John Pawlet, Marquess of Winchester.

The place where this gentleman faced his enemies was the chapel of his faith, pompous and glorious with every circumstance of art and wealth.

In front of the altar lay a dead priest ; the violet glow from the east window stained his old shrunken features, and beside him on the topmost step stood the Marquess ; above the altar and the Virgin hung a beautiful picture brought from Italy at great expense by my lord, and showing a saint singing between some others—all most richly done ; and this and the statue was the background for my lord.

He had his sword in his hand—a French rapier—water-waved in gold—and he wore a buff coat embroidered in silk and silver, and Spanish breeches with a fringe, and soft boots, but no manner of armour. He was bare-headed ; his hair, carefully trained into curls after the manner of the Court, framed a face white as a wall ; one

lock fell, in the fashion so abhorred by the Puritans, longer than the rest over his breast, and was tied with a small gold ribbon.

‘Truly,’ said Major Harrison exultingly, ‘the Lord of Israel hath given strength and power to His people! “As for the transgressors, they shall perish together; and the end of the ungodly is, they shall be rooted out at the last!”’

Then Lieutenant Cromwell demanded my lord’s sword.

‘The King did give me this blade, and to him alone will I return it,’ replied the Marquess.

‘Proud man!’ cried Cromwell. ‘Dost thou still vaunt thyself when God hath delivered thee, by His great mercy, into our hands?’

He turned to the soldiers.

‘Take this malignant prisoner and cast down these idolatrous shows and images—for what told I ye this morning? “*They that make them are like unto them*, so is every one who *trusteth in them*”—the which saying is now accomplished.’

When the Marquess saw the soldiers advancing upon him, he broke his light, small sword across his knee and cast it down beside the dead priest.

‘Though my faith and my sword lie low,’ he said, ‘yet in a better day they will arise.’

‘Cherish not vain hopes, Papist,’ cried Harrison, ‘but recant thine errors that have led thee to this disaster.’

At this, Mr. Hugh Peters, the teacher, who had newly entered the chapel, spoke.

‘Dost thou still so flourish? When the Lord hath been pleased in a few hours to show thee what mortal seed earthly glory groweth upon?—and how He, taking sinners in their own snares, lifteth up the heads of His despised people?’

The Marquess turned his back on Mr. Peters, and when the soldiers took hold of him and led him before the Lieutenant-General, he came unresisting, but in a silence more bitter than speech.

Cromwell spoke to him with a courtesy which seemed gentleness compared to the harshness of the others.

‘My lord,’ he said, ‘for your obstinate adherence to a

mistaken cause I must send you to London, a prisoner to the Parliament. God soften your heart and teach you the great peril your soul doth stand in.'

Lord Winchester smiled at him in utter disdain, and turned his head away, still silent.

Now Colonel Pickering came in and told Cromwell that above three hundred prisoners had been taken, and that Basing was wholly theirs, including the Grange or farm, where they had found sufficient provisions to last for a year or more and great store of ammunition and guns.

'The Lord grant,' said the Lieutenant-General, 'that these mercies be acknowledged with exceeding thankfulness.'

And thereupon he gave orders for the chapel to be destroyed.

'And I will see it utterly slighted and cast down,' he said, 'even as Moses saw the golden calf cast down and broken.'

The soldiers needed little encouragement, being already inflamed with zeal and the sight of the exceeding rich plunder, for never, since the war began, had they made booty of a place as splendid as Basing.

Major Harrison with his musket hurled over the image of the Virgin on the altar, and his followers made spoil of the golden vessels, the embroidered copes, stoles, and cloths, the cushions and carpets.

The altar-painting was ripped from end to end by a halbert, slashed across, and torn till it hung in a few ribbons of canvas; the gorgeous glass in the windows was smashed, the leading, as the only thing of value, dragged away, the marble carvings were chipped and broken, the mosaic walls defaced by blows from muskets and pikes.

After five minutes of this fury the chapel was a hideous havoc, and the Marquess could not restrain a passionate exclamation.

Cromwell turned to him.

'We destroy wood and stone and the articles of a licentious worship,' he said, 'but you have destroyed flesh and blood. To-day you shall see many popish books burnt—but at Smithfield it was human bodies.'

The Marquess made no reply, nor would he look at the

speaker, and they led him away through his desolated house.

Wild scenes of plunder were now taking place ; clothes, hangings, plate, jewels were seized upon, the iron was being wrenched from the windows, the lead from the roof ; what the soldiers could not remove they destroyed ; one wing of the house was alight with fierce fire, and into these flames was flung all that savoured of Popery ; from the Grange, wheat, bacon, cheese, beef, pork, and oatmeal were being carried away in huge quantities ; amid all the din and confusion came the cries for quarter of some of the baser sort who had taken refuge in the cellars, and divers groans from those of the wounded who lay unnoticed under fallen rubbish and in obscure corners.

Cromwell gave orders to stop the fire as much as might be, for, he said, these chairs, stools, and this household stuff will sell for a good price.

The pay of his soldiers was greatly in arrears, and he was glad to have this pillage to give them.

‘ It will be,’ he remarked, ‘ a good encouragement—for the labourer is worthy of his hire, and who goeth to warfare at his own cost ? ’

He and his officers, together with the Marquess and several other prisoners, now came (in the course of their leaving of the House) on the bedchamber of my lord, which caused the Puritans to gape with amaze, so rich beyond imaginings was this room, especially the bed, with great coverings of embroidered silk and velvet and a mighty canopy bearing my lord’s arms, all sparkling with bullion as was the tapestry on the walls.

Some soldiers were busy here, plundering my lord’s clothes, and others were fighting over bags of silver, and the crown-pieces were scattered all over the silk rugs.

Then Mr. Peters, who had been arguing with my lord on his sinful idolatrous ways, pressed home his advantage and pointed to the disaster about him and asked the Marquess if he did not plainly see the hand of God was against him ?

Lord Winchester, who had hitherto been silent, now broke out.

‘ If the King had had no more ground in England than

Basing House, I would have adventured as I did and maintained it to the uttermost ! ’

‘ Art so stubborn,’ cried Mr. Peters, ‘ when all is taken from thee ? ’

‘ Ay,’ said the Marquess, ‘ Loyalty House this was called, and in that I take comfort, hoping His Majesty may have his day again. As for me, I have done what I could ; and though this hour be as death, yet I would sooner be as I am than as thou art ! ’

And he said this with such sharp scorn and with an air so princely (as became his noble breeding) that Hugh Peters was for awhile silenced.

But Oliver Cromwell said, ‘ Thou must say thy say at Westminster.’

And so fell Basing in full pride.

CHAPTER VIII

THE KING’S FOLLY

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL CROMWELL lay encamped outside Oxford ; Chester had lately fallen, and Gloucester, and when the Parliamentarians took Oxford, as they must certainly soon take it, the King would have not a foot of ground left in England.

The King was in Oxford ; he had gone from Newark to Wales, he had wandered awhile with such scattered forces as were left him with Rupert and Maurice, and then he had returned once more to the faithful, loyal city that might continue to be both faithful and loyal, but could not much longer resist the enemy that was ever pressing closer round her grey walls.

It was April. ‘ We must end the war this year,’ Cromwell said. The people expected a peace and a settlement from the Parliament ; the only question now in the minds of the leaders was, what peace and settlement would the King make, and keep, now he was fairly beaten ?

This question was foremost night and day in the mind of General Cromwell.

This day, towards the end of April, he sat in his tent

outside the beleaguered city, smoking a pipeful of Virginian tobacco and gazing out at the spring landscape and the near encampment of the Parliamentary army, which was illumined by the dubious light of a misty moon.

Two companions were with him—Henry Ireton, who was to wed Bridget Cromwell at the conclusion of the war, and Major Harrison, a soldier not so entirely to the Lieutenant-General's liking as his prospective son-in-law, still, a deeply religious man and dauntless soldier, if too strongly tinged with that fanaticism which was now the main-spring of the new model army.

A discussion which involved some difference of opinion was taking place between the three Puritans; Cromwell, who was one against two, was much more silent than his wont, for it was usual for him to speak at great length, with many illustrations of his meaning (which served, however, as much for confusing his purpose as for enlightening it, and had already got him the name of dissembler among his opponents) and great fervour and enthusiasm; he could never be called taciturn, but to-night he was silent with a kind of dumbness as if one of his melancholies were on him, whereas Harrison and Ireton expounded their case with much rigour and eloquence.

And their case was that the King was utterly and entirely not to be trusted, and that any pact or bargain made with him would be a useless thing, not worth the sheepskin it was written upon.

'As witness,' said Major Harrison, 'his solemn protestation to the Commons that he loved them as his own children, and a few days after his coming down to the House and claiming the five—as witness his promises and false oaths to Parliament which his papers taken at Naseby did show he never meant to keep, but was the while trying to bring over Lorrainers to cut our throats—and what of this last business in Ireland when he sent Lord Glamorgan over to stir up the Irish Papists, and then, when the scheme was discovered, forsook my lord and utterly denied him and the Papists too?'

'As he forsook Strafford,' added Ireton. 'That deed alone would have spoilt the credit of a private man, and to my thinking spoils the credit of a king too.'

‘He tried to save him,’ said Cromwell briefly.

‘Nay, his lady, being Sir Denzil Holles’ sister, was the one who made the effort for the reprieve, as I know from Sir Denzil,’ replied Ireton; ‘the King shook him off like an old cloak, as he would shake off any friend he thought was likely to be hurtful to him.’

Harrison took up the theme with the greater vehemence of his low origin and coarse training, for though his noble appearance and military appointments gave him some of the appearance of that equality with his fellow-officers which he claimed by reason of his military rank, still, when he spoke, it was obvious that neither the levelling of war nor religion could do away with the distinctions of birth and education; Cromwell and Ireton were as clearly gentlemen as Harrison, the son of a butcher, was clearly not.

‘What is dealing with the King but trafficking with Egypt,’ he concluded his peroration, ‘and setting up a covenant with the powers of darkness? Can good come from tinkling with such as Charles Stewart? Nay, rather a curse upon the land.’

Oliver Cromwell took the pipe out of his mouth; he sat near the entrance to the tent, and the feeble moonlight was full over his rugged profile.

The one oil-lamp had burnt out, and the three soldiers either had not noticed, or were indifferent to the fact, that they were sitting in the half-dark.

‘Shallow and frivolous he may be, nay, hath been proved to be,’ said Cromwell slowly. ‘*But he is the King.* Major Harrison, those words are as a tower of strength, as a wand of enchantment—there is the weight of seven hundred years or more to support them—and Charles, without one soldier, means more to England than you or I could ever mean were we backed by millions.’

‘During those seven hundred years you speak of,’ replied Harrison grimly, ‘there have been kings so detestable that means have been found to put them off their thrones. The thing is not without precedence.’

‘Nay, surely,’ said the Lieutenant-General gently; ‘but in the wars and quarrels of which you speak some rival prince was always there to take his kinsman’s place.’

This is not a dispute among kings and nobles, but an uprising of the people for their liberty to force the King to grant them their just demands—therefore, the case is without precedent.'

'And what, sir, do you deduct from that?' asked Henry Ireton.

'Why, that if we put the King down there is no one to set in his place. The Prince of Wales hath gone abroad to the French Court and a Papist mother; the King's nephew, the Elector Charles Louis, who was flattered with some hopes of the succession, is a silly choice; the King's other sons are children, Rupert and Maurice are free lances—and which of these, were he ever so desirable, would be accepted by the nation while the King lives?'

There was a little pause, and then Harrison said boldly—

'Why need we a king at all?'

'It is a good form of government,' replied Cromwell, 'and I believe the only one the English will take. If you have no king you may have a worse thing—every shallow pate faction casts to the top seizing the direction of affairs. It was never the design of any of us,' he added, 'to depose the King when we took up arms.'

'Nay,' admitted Ireton, 'the design was to bring him to reason, but how may that be done when we deal with one who knows not the name of reason?'

'Now,' said the Lieutenant-General, 'he has no power to be false. Nor will the Parliament ever again be as defenceless as it was when he was last at Whitehall.'

'Then,' put in Ireton shrewdly, 'if you offer terms to the King which leave the power of the sword with the Parliament, you offer what he, even in his utmost extremity, will not accept.'

'We have had no experience of what he will do in extremity,' replied Cromwell, 'since he has never come to it till now.'

'But has he not,' cried Harrison, 'always refused to give up what he terms his rights? Did he not contemptuously reject the Uxbridge Treaty?'

'As any man might have guessed he would,' replied Cromwell dryly; he had been no party to the folly of the Presbyterians in asking the King to accept these impos-

sible conditions. 'He will always be a Prelatist, yet he might—nay, he must—rule according to the laws of England, and allow all men freedom in their thoughts.'

'He never will!' exclaimed Harrison.

'He must,' repeated Cromwell.

His pipe had now gone out; he knocked out the ashes against the tent pole and rose.

'The settlement of this war,' remarked Henry Ireton, 'is like to be more trouble than the fighting of it.'

'What,' asked Cromwell, with that half-moody, half-tender melancholy that so often marked his speech, 'avail these doubts and surmises? It is but lost labour that ye haste to rise up so early and so late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness—"it is in the Lord's hands—the Lord's will be done."'

Major Harrison rose also; he wore part of his armour; vambrace and cuirass clattered as he moved.

'Ay,' he said, 'worthy Mr. Hugh Peters did wrestle in prayer with the Lord for three hours on that point, and afterwards held forth in lovely words—yet were we still in darkness as to God's will with us—'

'Doubt not,' answered Cromwell fervently, 'that He will make it manifest as He hath done aforetime.'

He paused in his pacing and turned to face the huge soldier, who now stood with one hand on the tent flap, holding it back.

The moon was sinking, a white wafer behind the gates and towers of Oxford, but the first flush of the dawn replaced her misty light.

'I look for the Lord!' cried Cromwell. 'My soul doth wait for Him, in His word is my trust—"My soul fleeth unto the Lord before the morning watch, I say before the morning watch!"'

'Ay,' added Harrison, with a coarser enthusiasm and a blunter speech; 'and when the Lord cometh what shall He say—but slay Dagon and his adherents, put to the sword the Amalekite and Edomite and all the brood of the Red Dragon. And who is the foremost of these but Charles Stewart?'

'The Lord,' replied Cromwell, 'hath not yet put it into my soul to put the King down, nor to utterly slight his

authority. Yet on all these matters I would rather be silent—this is scarce the time for speech on this subject.’

Major Harrison picked up his morion, which bore in front the single feather that denoted his rank, and with a few words of farewell left the tent.

Ireton prepared to follow him.

‘A good repose, Harry,’ said Cromwell affectionately. ‘We have talked over long, and I fear to little purpose. We must come to these arguments again at Westminster. Get now some sleep—farewell.’

When Henry Ireton had gone, Cromwell continued to walk up and down the worn turf that formed the floor of the tent.

‘Ah, soul, my soul,’ he muttered, ‘art thou wandering again in blackness, not knowing which way to turn? Do the waters come in and overwhelm thee? Yet did not the Lord receive thee into His grace, and make with thee a Covenant and a promise? The sword of the Lord and Gideon!—has it not been given thee to wield that weapon, and to triumph with it? Was not the Lord’s hand plainly shown in that they have felled the malignants as the bricks of Basing that fell down one from the other? And hast thou not permitted them to be utterly consumed from the land, even from Havilah unto Shur?’

While he thus exhorted and chided some inner weakness or sadness that was liable to come over him, most often at night, and when he was inactive, speaking aloud, as was his wont when thus excited, he was startled by the sudden entry of one of his officers.

The man was preceded by the soldier in attendance on Cromwell, who had kept guard outside his tent, and now carried a lantern, the strong beams of which, disturbing the dubious light of the tent, showed the figure of Cromwell standing by the camp-bed on which his armour was piled.

‘Sir,’ began the officer, ‘we have made, outside the city, a prisoner, whom it is expedient Your Excellency should see.’

‘For what purpose, Colonel Parsons?’ asked Cromwell wearily, and hanging his head on his breast, as he did when tired or thoughtful.

‘Because the malignant, defying us, with much fury,

did declare a strange thing. He said that the King had escaped from Oxford two days or so ago.'

Cromwell looked up sharply; his face seemed full of shadows.

'Bring the prisoner before me,' he said briefly, and seated himself on the leathern camp-chair at the foot of his rough couch.

The officer retired, and soon returned accompanied by two halberdiers escorting a young Cavalier, completely disarmed and dusty and disordered in his dress, as if he had made a fair struggle before surrendering his liberty.

'Thy name?' asked Cromwell.

'Charles Lucas,' replied the young man.

'And what hast thou to say of this escape of the King from Oxford?'

The young man laughed.

'I may now freely tell thee, thou cunning rebel, that His Sacred Majesty is by now safe in the hands of his faithful Scots.'

Cromwell scarcely repressed a violent start.

'He went from Oxford in the guise of a groom,' continued Sir Charles, in a tone of amusement and triumph; 'and I, for one, helped him.'

'Even so?' said Cromwell, and gazed upon him absently.

'Shall I not,' asked Colonel Parsons, 'have the young malignant shot before the sun is up?'

The Lieutenant-General roused himself from deep thought with an effort.

'Nay, let him go,' he said; 'we want no more corpses nor prisoners.'

Parsons, with the freedom the Independent officers took, remonstrated.

'He is a Socinian, a Prelatist, an Erastian—even as a soldier of Pekah or Jeroboam!'

'Let him go,' repeated Cromwell, with his usual mildness, 'it is now a matter of days. Spare all the blood you can, Colonel Parsons.'

The dark red flushed the royalist's cheek.

'I want no mercy nor quarter from rebels,' he said haughtily.

'Silly boy,' smiled Cromwell, 'take thy vaunts elsewhere,' and Sir Charles, whether he would or no, was hustled out of the tent.

Cromwell sat motionless awhile, holding his hand before his eyes.

'The Scots,' he was swiftly thinking, 'what a turn is here . . . he will not take the Covenant. . . . Then he is ours for the asking . . . helpless any way. . . . the Scots! . . . Thou art an ill statesman, Charles Stewart. . . . Methinks the war is ended.'

CHAPTER IX

THE END OF THE WAR

IN June of that year two women sat together in an upper room of a humble, though decent, house in London, near the Abbey of Westminster and the Hall where the Parliament was now sitting.

This was a back street, crooked and obscure ; never as yet had it been touched nor disturbed by the clamours and tumults which of late had risen and fallen through the broad ways of London like the tempestuous rising and falling of the winter sea.

The two women sat near the window and talked together in low voices.

One was in her prime but spoilt by sorrow and sickness, her blonde hair mixed with grey as if dust had been sprinkled upon it, her face peaked and thin, her lids heavy, her eyes dimmed ; the other little beyond girlhood, but she too disfigured by suffering, and nothing remaining to her of the pleasant beauty of youth save the flowing richness of her red-gold curls.

Both were simply, even humbly, clad, in heavy mourning.

The younger, after a pause of silence during which both gazed out at the sun among the green with eyes that no longer kindled to such a sight, remarked—

'Bridget Cromwell is married to-day.'

'Yes,' replied the other ; 'they say it is a sure sign of a general peace.'

The young gentlewoman made no reply to this remark, but glanced down at the wedding-ring on her fair thin hand.

‘I wonder,’ she cried fiercely, ‘if she is as happy as I was when I was a bride. I wonder if she will ever come to be as unhappy as I am now!’

Lady Strafford did not reply, and her companion, with the tears smarting up into eyes already worn with weeping, continued—

‘I could find it in my heart to wish that the rebel’s daughter might find herself, at my years, a childless widow!’

‘Hush, Jane,’ said the Countess; ‘this is not charity!’

‘The times,’ replied Lady William Pawlet, ‘do not teach charity. Thou art nobly patient, but I have not yet learnt to hush my railing. All, all gone and an empty life! Madonna! how can one support the burden! Oh, to be a man and go forward in the front ranks to die as Lord Falkland did! But to be a woman—a woman who must wait till she die of remembering!’

‘There is no answer to be made—none,’ said the Countess; ‘the heart knoweth its own bitterness.’

‘And we sit here in poverty, bereaved and desolate, and Oliver Cromwell hath my Lord Worchester’s estates and the thanks of Parliament,’ continued Lady William, following out thoughts too bitter to be kept silent. ‘Loyalty now must go barefoot and impudent knavery swell in high places! I will go abroad to the Queen in Paris—she too is desolate and maybe can employ me about her person, for I will no longer be a charge on you, madam. Will you not,’ she added, in a more timid tone, ‘come too?’

‘I will not, willingly,’ replied the elder lady firmly, ‘ever see Her Majesty again. Nor yet the King. Thank God I can keep my loyalty and wish His Majesty a safe deliverance from all his present perils, but this I know, that were he to taste the bitterest death and she the bitterest widowhood, both, in the extreme hour of their misery, could endure no greater torment than to remember Lord Strafford and how he died.’

She spoke quietly without raised voice or flushed cheek,

yet so intensely, that Jane Pawlet, who had never heard her mention this subject before, was horrified and awed.

'The world is upside down, I think,' she murmured. 'It all seems to me so unreal—I doubt it can be more strange in hell.'

'You are young,' replied the Countess, 'and may live to think of all this as a clouded dream. But my life is over.'

'You have been the wife of a great man,' cried Lady William Pawlet, 'and you have children.'

'Whom I must see grow up as landless exiles, bearing an attainted name,' said Lady Strafford, with a stern smile.

'But you have fulfilled yourself,' returned the other, 'while I have been, and am, useless. Ah me, how differently I dreamed it!'

Then the poor widow, overwhelmed by recollections of a happiness which now seemed the doubly dazzling because it had been so brief, rose to conceal her emotion, and moved restlessly round the room.

Lady Strafford glanced at her and, with an effort to distract her mind, touched on another subject.

'I had a letter from Margaret Lucas in Paris—so ill spelt I can hardly read it; but it seems the Marquess of Newcastle hath come to St. Germain's and that they are reading each other's poetry—so belike there will be a match there.'

'Ah, yes?' said Lady William heavily.

'They have both lost their estates,' continued the Countess, 'so it will be a fair trial of their love and constancy.'

As she spoke there was a light, almost uncertain knock on the door.

Lady Strafford, who, in her narrow circumstances, kept no servant, looked from the window cautiously.

'It is my brother,' she said, and the younger lady at once left the room, soon returning accompanied by Sir Denzil Holles.

This gentleman had always been of a contrary party to the Earl of Strafford, and in the first part of his life had seen but little of his magnificent sister. He had, however,

done his utmost to save the Earl's life, and was now almost the principle support of the Countess and her children.

He was not in arms for Parliament (though he had been one of the famous five members), and, being estranged from the army by the fact of his Presbyterian religion, and animated by a great dislike of Oliver Cromwell, he stood as much aloof as he was able from the clashes of the times, though he led a considerable party in the Commons.

'Any news?' asked his sister, after greeting him affectionately.

'The usual,' replied Sir Denzil gloomily. 'Oxford surrendered—the princes and Sir Ralph Hopton are gone beyond seas—Sir Jacob Astley with the last force of royalists hath been taken—and Bridget Cromwell is now Bridget Ireton.'

'The King's cause, then,' said the Countess, 'is utterly lost and ruined?'

'As far as it can be maintained by arms, it is,' replied her brother, who, though he had been imprisoned by King Charles, showed no great elation at his downfall. 'And as it is certain he will not take the Covenant—why, you may take it it is altogether ruined.'

'He will not?' asked Lady William Pawlet.

'Nay, though they have entreated him on their knees, with tears—as have we, the Presbyterians—and if he will not take it, there is not a single Scot will shoulder a musket for him.'

'It seems,' remarked the Countess quietly, 'that the King can be faithful to some things.'

'Ay,' said Sir Denzil, 'to the Church of England and his Crown. I believe he would resign life itself sooner than either.'

'Therefore, if the Scots will not fight there is an end of the war?' said his sister. 'Well, Denzil, what shall we do?'

'Get beyond seas, unless I can put down the army,' he replied. 'This is no longer a country for such as I. The King is overcome—but in his place is like to be a worse tyrant.'

'You mean Oliver Cromwell?'

'Yes,' said Denzil Holles bitterly. 'That man is now

the front of all things—he hath the army at his back and groweth bigger every day.’

‘The talk is,’ said his sister, ‘that he would make accommodation with the King, whereas many of his party are for measures the most extreme, even for setting up a Republic—so it is said—but I know not. What does one hear but echoes of echoes in a retirement such as this?’

‘It matters not,’ replied Sir Denzil, ‘things are all ajar in England. I have a mind to Holland to a little quiet, some books, a few friends—Ralph Hopton is at the Hague. I can be no use in this whirligig, and I will save what little credit, what little fortune, I have left.’

He had often spoken so before, but had always been drawn back to the whirlpool at Westminster, and his sister believed that he would be so again.

‘Well, well,’ said Lady Strafford, ‘London is no place for me—every paving-stone hath a memory. . . . And you, child, will you go to Paris?’

‘Yes, madam, to the Queen, who was always a good friend to me. We have the same faith, as you know.’

‘The noble family of Pawlet,’ remarked Sir Denzil gracefully, ‘have a great claim on the house of Stewart. The defence of Basing was one of the noblest actions of this unhappy war.’

‘The Marquess lost everything,’ said Lady William Pawlet. ‘Even the bricks were pulled down and sold—even my lord’s shirts—and his bedchamber invaded by the vulgar, who burnt all the tapestry there for the sake of the gold threads in it, and they were the most beautiful hangings in England. What is loyalty’s reward? Bitter, I fear, bitter.’

She glanced out of the window at the unchanging sunshine as if it hurt her eyes, then moved away again restlessly round the room.

The Countess made an effort to stir a silence that was so full of memories, of regrets, of disappointments.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘the war is over and we shall go abroad; but what will happen in England?’

‘That,’ replied Sir Denzil sternly, ‘is very much in the hands of Oliver Cromwell.’

PART III

THE CRISIS

‘Robin, be honest still. God keep thee in the midst of snares. Thou hast naturally a valiant spirit. Listen to God, and He shall increase it upon thee, and make thee valiant for the truth. I am a poor creature that write to thee, the poorest in the world, but I have hope in God, and desire from my heart to love His people.’—*Lieutenant-General Cromwell to Colonel Hammond, Nov. 1648.*

CHAPTER I

THE ISSUE WITH THE KING

ON a summer afternoon in the year 1647, an officer, with a small escort of arquebusiers, rode from Putney to Hampton village, and turning briskly towards the palace, passed unchallenged, and saluted by the sentries, through the great iron gates, over the moat, and stopped at the principal entrance.

The captain of the guard-house came out.

‘’Tis Lieutenant-General Cromwell!’ he exclaimed.

‘Ah, Colonel Parsons,’ returned the other pleasantly. ‘I do recall that thou went here——’

‘Things have changed since we besieged Oxford, sir,’ said Parsons.

‘Ay, and gotten themselves into a fine confusion,’ replied Cromwell; ‘but I will see the King. Tell His Majesty who waits.’

‘Nay, sir, step in,’ said Parsons; ‘the days are gone by when men had to wait for an audience of His Majesty.’

‘Yet I trust to it that he is entertained with civility?’ said the Lieutenant-General. ‘Were it otherwise it would look very ill.’

Without waiting for a reply to this, which was intended

more as a rebuke to Parsons' tone of speech than as question, for Cromwell knew very well how the King was treated and lodged, the Lieutenant-General passed up the stairs and along the galleries towards the royal apartments, preceded by one of the palace attendants.

Parsons looked after him with mingled admiration and envy.

'There goes the darling of the army and the terror of the Parliament,' he said to another officer who had joined him. 'They no more know what to do with Noll Cromwell than they know what to do with Charles Stewart.'

He voiced the common view of the situation of the Parliament men; the which had indeed found themselves in greater difficulties during the peace than they had done during the war, though they had succeeded in getting the Scots out of the kingdom and the King into their own hands.

After wearisome and confused negotiations between the King, the Scots, and the Presbyterians had come to nothing through Charles' haughty refusal to forsake the Church of England and take the solemn Covenant, the Parliament had paid the Scots £20,000, as an instalment of the pay due to them, and on this the Northerners had marched away across the Borders to the endless disputes among themselves, headed by Argyll, the Covenanter, and Hamilton, the royalist, who were now one up, now one down, like boys on a see-saw.

The King had been delivered to the Parliamentary Commissioners and lodged with great respect at Holmby.

And then the Parliament was confronted with other problems: On one hand the clamours of the people for a good understanding with His Majesty, and on the other side the claims of the army, which refused to be disbanded without the arrears of pay owing, which arrears were not forthcoming except in so small a proportion as to be indignantly refused by the soldiers.

Some of the right was on the side of the army and all the might. Neither Parliament nor nation could do anything with them, especially as all the force and fervour of the new Puritan religion which had defeated the King was to be found in the ranks of the soldiers, for nearly all

the Parliament men were Presbyterians, and nearly all the army belonged to one or other of the enthusiastic sects commonly named 'Independents'; and on either side of this cleavage of religious belief was nearly as much bitterness as had animated Puritan and Papist against each other.

Denzil Holles had resolved to stay in England, and was busy leading a party in Parliament against the chiefs of the army, principally against the Lieutenant-General, who was looked upon as the great man of his side, nay, by some, as the great man of the nation.

He, on his part, maintained a singular quiet, nor put himself forward in any way. He had moved his family from Ely to London, and there resided quietly or moved about from place to place as his duties called, contradicting no man and interfering with none; yet somehow his figure was always in the background of men's thoughts, and all either feared him, or looked to him hopefully as their case might be, as if from him must come, sooner or later, the healing of the schisms, the twisting together of the intricate strands of faction, the smoothing out of the tangled confusions that now maddened and bewildered men.

There were able, honest leaders in every sect and faction, there were clever, high-minded politicians like Sir Harry Vane, there were energetic and successful soldiers like Sir Thomas Fairfax, and there were men like Ireton who combined the qualities of both—all of whom were respected and followed by their several parties. But none stood out so vividly in the eyes of both friend and foe as did the figure of Oliver Cromwell, whose cavalry charges had turned the tide of battle at Marston Moor and Naseby, who was the idol of that army which seemed now to hold the balance of power, and whose utterances in Parliament had shown him to be as decisive, as wary, as brilliant in attack, as quick in resource, as commanding a personality in politics as he was on the battlefield.

Yet there was perhaps no one, among all the men whom the times had made prominent, who kept so in the background of events during the last turmoils, confusions, and intricacies of the negotiations and consultations between

the King, the Scots, the Parliament, the Army, the Presbyterians, and the Independents.

Since the conclusion of the Civil War, the King had been, and continued to be, the great element of discord and difficulty. No one could resign themselves to do without him, and no one knew what to do with him; the Scots had given him up in despair, and the Parliamentary Commissioners found him equally impossible to deal with. A general deadlock had been solved, Gordian knot fashion, by the army; Cornet Joyce and six hundred men, acting under what orders no one knew, but acting certainly according to the general wish, had carried off the King (very much to his will and liking), from Holmby, to the great dismay of the parliamentary Presbyterians, and lodged him at Hinchinbrook, from whence he moved about with the army, treated in kingly style. He was finally taken to Hampton Court, the army headquarters being now at Putney, in such ominous nearness to London that the great city itself was believed to tremble, and at Westminster there was open turmoil.

Lieutenant-General Cromwell, who, with the other officers, had been ordered to his regiments when news came of Cornet Joyce's amazing action, but who had already gone (not without some haste, his enemies said, for fear of an arrest from the incensed Parliament, for it was credited that his was the authority under which Joyce had acted), had remained at Putney for some weeks before this visit of his to Hampton Court.

He was, with little delay, admitted to the King's ante-chamber, where Lord Digby received him, and soon into the King's presence. The apartment was one of the beautiful chambers built and decorated by Henry VIII.; old oak, carved in a deep linen pattern and worn to a colour that was almost dark silver, formed the walls, and round the deep blue painted ceiling ran a design of 'A. H.' and the Tudor roses, quartered thus to please the first English Queen who died a public and shameful death.

An oriel window, brilliant with painted blazonry, was set open on to the gardens which sloped to the willow trees and the river, and in the red-cushioned window-seat the King's white dog slept.

The furniture was very handsome stately oak and stamped Spanish leather; above the low mantelshelf hung a picture by Antonio Mor, a portrait of the sad-faced Mary Tudor, in white cambric and black velvet, gold chain, and breviary.

Charles was seated at a coral-red lacquer cabinet or desk powdered with gold figures—a princely piece of furniture, rich and costly. Cromwell, seeing him, paused in the doorway and took off his broad-leaved hat.

The two exchanged a quick and steady look. Cromwell had last seen the King at Childerly House, only a few weeks before, when he and General Fairfax had ridden down to Huntingdon to meet His Majesty; but the interview had been brief, by torchlight, and the Lieutenant-General had taken little part in it. The King, too, had been largely obscured by a horseman's hat and cloak, so that the last clear remembrance Cromwell had of the King remained that of the famous day when Charles had come to Westminster to seize the five members.

That scene and the central figure of it remained very vividly in Cromwell's mind, even across all the stormy years which lay between then and now. He recalled the unutterable haughtiness, the poise, the splendour, the rich attire of the King then; he would not have known the man before him for the same.

Charles wore a brown cloth suit passemented with silver, grey hose, and shoes with dark red roses on them; his whole attire was careless, even neglected, and he had no jewellery, order, or any kind of adornment, save a deep falling collar of Flemish thread lace.

But the change in his attire was not so remarkable as the change in his appearance; his hair, which still fell in love-locks on to his shoulders, was utterly grey, and his face had a grey look too, so entirely devoid was it of any brightness of colour, his features were swollen and suffused, and his eyes were heavy-lidded and unutterably weary.

It gave Oliver Cromwell a sudden start to see the King, whose mere name was such a tower of strength, who had vaunted himself so proudly, and been so tenacious of his royal rights, reduced to this semblance of beaten humanity who bore on his face the marks of how he had suffered

in body and soul. Cromwell himself had changed too ; he was a year older than Charles, but, in his untouched vigour and ardent air of strength and enthusiasm, looked many years younger ; his buff and soldierly appointments were richer than formerly, and he carried himself with an air of greater authority and decision.

Charles set down the quill with which he was writing, and pointed to a chair with arms near the window.

‘What can Lieutenant-General Cromwell,’ he said, with a most delicate, most scornful, emphasis on the title, ‘want with me ?’

Cromwell gazed at him with unabashed grey eyes. It might be acutely in the King’s mind that it was strange for a country gentleman to be thus facing a King of England, but no such thought disturbed the Puritan.

‘Sir,’ he returned, ‘the nation is in a crisis that must end soon—the army and the Parliament are in disagreements. We are the victims of unsearchable judgments.’

‘Yes,’ agreed Charles, who was not sorry to hear it, and who hoped, in the troubled waters of these divisions, to fish for his own benefit ; he was already like a wedge between Parliament and army, splitting them further apart.

‘I am here,’ continued Cromwell, ‘as representing the army.’

‘Sent by a deputation ?’ asked the King keenly. His greatest hope was in the army.

‘Sent by no deputation,’ returned the other firmly. ‘Inspired only by the Lord, yet what I offer I could engage the fulfilment of.’

There was a quiet assumption of power in these words that was wormwood to the King, but he controlled himself.

‘You have come to propose terms,’ he said. ‘I have been listening to terms for long weary months. What are yours ?’

‘Nay, I make no terms with Your Majesty,’ said Cromwell. ‘I only wish you to be sincere with your people.’

It was what John Pym had said at the very beginning—before the war, Charles remembered ; he remembered,

too, that he had offered Pym a price and Pym had refused. 'You did not bid high enough,' the Queen said afterwards. Charles, ever untaught by experience, proceeded to repeat with Cromwell the tactics he had used with Pym. What, after all, could this man have come for, save to drive a bargain? And he was worth bargaining with, as Pym had been—powerful rebels both!

The King's eyes shot hate at the quiet figure before him, but he answered smoothly—

'Sincere! You and I speak a different language, sir, but I will try to understand you. You mean that the army will do something for me? That you might influence them on my behalf?'

Cromwell rose and moved to the oriel window; an expression of agitation swept into his face.

'Sir,' he said, with deep earnestness, 'Your Majesty is the only remedy for these present divisions—until a good peace be established, and you be again at Whitehall, the nation is but like a parcel of twigs which, unbound, cannot stand. Sir, I know there are extreme men who think otherwise, but they are of the sort who are always there, and must be never heeded.'

A wave of exultation made the blood bound in the King's veins: he was then indispensable to the nation. His swift, secret thought was that he might regain his throne on his own terms, without yielding a jot of his prerogatives, since his arch-enemy admitted what he had admitted.

'The army desires to see Your Majesty in your rightful place,' continued Cromwell, 'and would and could bring you to London despite the Parliament.'

'Well?' asked Charles.

'We must have,' said Cromwell, with a certain heaviness, 'the things for which we have fought, for which we have poured out our blood.'

A bitterly sarcastic smile curved the King's thin lips. Cromwell was coming to his price, he thought; he wondered what he would ask, and what might be promised with safety.

'We must have toleration for God's people,' said the Puritan.

The King interrupted.

'I will not take the Covenant. I have already refused an army because of that condition.'

'You are now, sir,' returned Cromwell bluntly, 'dealing with Englishmen, not Scots. We set no such store by the Covenant. I said, sir, toleration.'

'A word,' remarked Charles, 'beloved of fanatics.'

'A word,' said Cromwell, unmoved, 'dear to honest men. We would have all deal with God according to their conscience.'

The King did not think it worth while to probe into the reservation this tolerance made in disfavour of Prelacy and Papacy, the two faiths *he* believed in. The whole gamut of theological questions had been run through and argued upon during the conferences at Newcastle, and had left Charles as firm an adherent as before of the Anglican Church. The whole subject of the Puritan faith, associated as it was with vexation, disloyalty, and rebellion, was too distasteful a one for him to enter on; he reserved his wit and strength for the more practical issues.

'Will you tell me briefly, sir, the main purpose of this visit?'

'I wished,' said Cromwell, 'to sound Your Majesty. The army would not waste its labours—and Your Majesty hath been slippery,' he added calmly.

The outraged blood stormed the King's cheeks; but the several instances of his duplicity were too well known and too well attested to be for an instant denied.

'I am a prisoner,' he said haughtily, 'and therefore forbidden resentment.'

With trembling fingers he drew nearer to him a bowl of yellow roses that stood on his desk and nervously pulled at the leaves.

Cromwell did not look at him, but at the peaceful and lovely view of garden and river beyond the oriel window.

'The army,' he pursued quietly, giving weight to every word, 'would have no trafficking with foreign powers, no bringing of foreign forces, no stirrings and meddlings in Ireland or Scotland, no vengeance taken on any of their number, a free Parliament, and free churches. To a king who could agree to these things—sware to them—*on the word of a king*, and on that pledge keep them—there would

be small difficulty in his coming again to his ancient place and power. Remember these things, Your Majesty; consider and ponder them. I shall come again to consult with you. "Put thou thy trust in the Lord, and be doing good: dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed—delight thou in the Lord, and He shall give thee thy heart's desire." Cast thyself on these words, sir, that God hath moved me to say to thee.'

He spoke with such earnestness, dignity, such extraordinary conviction that the King's sneer died on his lips, and though his sensation of respect was instantly gone, still it had been there.

'Above all,' added Cromwell, 'I pray Your Majesty be sincere. If you mislike what I have said, what I have asked of you—bid me not to come again.'

The King took this to mean, 'Will you deal with me or no?' and he answered without hesitation, for he was well aware of Cromwell's power and prestige.

'Come again and let us talk of these things at leisure. I commonly walk in the galleries in the afternoon. Let me some day have your company.'

He rose; a smile softened his haggard face into something of its ancient grace.

'Do not disappoint me of your second coming,' he said.

He held out his hand. Cromwell, without hesitation or confusion, kissed it and left.

While his steps were yet sounding without, Charles rang a bell on his desk that instantly summoned Lord Digby from the adjoining apartment.

'Open the window wider!' cried the King, with a shudder. 'The air is tainted. . . .'

CHAPTER II

THE KING'S PLOTS

'**T**HAT man,' added Charles, in a tone of great agitation, 'will make terms. He came abruptly and left abruptly, he spoke obscurely—but his meaning was to offer himself for my service.'

‘It is no wonder,’ replied Lord Digby, ‘there is a great and widening rift between the army and the Parliament, and Cromwell hath been heard to very plainly urge on the Presbyterians the advisability of submitting to Your Majesty.’

‘What,’ muttered the King, walking about the room, ‘does he want?’

‘Did he not tell Your Majesty? Methought that had been the object of his visit.’

‘He told me,’ replied Charles, ‘the usual demands—what the army would have, what it would not have. I take no notice of that. What doth he want for himself?’

‘His price would be a high one,’ returned Lord Digby thoughtfully. ‘He is much esteemed by his party; he hath good hopes of rising.’

‘Faugh!’ cried the King angrily. ‘He hath *risen*—what more can he hope? He comes to me because he finds his usurped honours perilous, because he can hardly hold his own. There is no loyalty in the fellow. I take him to be a very artful, false rebel.’

‘Yet,’ said my lord earnestly, ‘he is worth gaining. I know of none whom the rebels think so highly of, and his interest in the army is supreme.’

‘I also have some interest in the army,’ said Charles haughtily. ‘Dost thou not know it? Even as this Cromwell knoweth it—else why doth he come to me? Nay, he is well aware that I still count for something in this my kingdom.’

‘Still, I would say that it were well to gain Oliver Cromwell—if he be willing to bring the army over to Your Majesty. I say, he is greater in the public eye than we can think. His party taketh him for a man.’

‘And so he is, and therefore can be gained,’ replied Charles, with a bitter smile. ‘I tell thee it goes to my heart to deal with this fellow, whom I would very willingly see hanged; indeed, it does. But as I do believe he hath influence, I will do it. What would he have—some patent of nobility? It were fitting to offer him the rebel Essex’s title. Hath he not some distant relation to that Thomas Cromwell who was the Earl of Essex?’

‘I have heard it,’ assented Lord Digby, ‘and I believe

that Your Majesty hath hit on a good bait. Cromwell hath much railed against the nobility, which is a good sign in a man that he would have a title himself.'

'And Fairfax—I must throw a sop to Fairfax,' continued Charles. 'There is more loyalty and more manners in him than in his Lieutenant.'

'He is not,' added Lord Digby, 'so useful.'

Charles paused before the window.

'You know,' he said, 'that my best hopes are still in Scotland, and not with these rebels. If I can make a secret treaty with the Scots, I am independent of army and Parliament both.'

Lord Digby was not practical nor level-headed. His loyalty was too sincere to allow him broad-mindedness in his view of the struggle now taking place in England, and his ideas were rather fantastical and partook of that lightness and even frivolity which characterized so many of the King's followers; but even he could not help seeing that Charles was playing a game which every day became more dangerous, and that this complicated and subtle intrigue was not suited to present circumstances. A straight dealing with the army leaders, the Cavalier thought, would have been better than these underhand negotiations with the Scots, who had already proved themselves so unreliable, especially as Charles never would, under any pressure, take the Covenant, and therefore his alliance with Scotland could only be based on delusion and fraud; while, at the same time, if these negotiations were revealed, the English Parliament and the English army would be further set against the King, and with England and the divisions in England lay Charles' best chance—not in his northern kingdom.

It was these constant intrigues and subterfuges on the part of the King, his blindness to his real interests, his unconquerable disdain of his enemies, his firm refusal to believe that any pact or agreement was possible between him, the King, and them, his subjects, his proud resignation, which would take any ill, but would never give way on any detail, however small, that had driven those fierce and downright Princes, Rupert and Maurice, out of England. Rupert had thought the Royal cause lost before he de-

livered Bristol, yet the King had had many chances since then, all lost, or missed, or flung away.

He was too extraordinarily incredulous of his enemies' successes ; it seemed as if he could not believe nor remember that he was no longer what he had been, one of the foremost kings in Europe, but a monarch without an army, without a town, without revenues or allies, separated from his family, surrounded by adversaries, practically a prisoner, and dependent on the dole of the Parliament for the very bread he ate. Charles could not realize these things—his birth, his instincts, his character were too strong for his intelligence, though that was not mean—and he still blinded himself with the idea that he was *the King*, and that he needed no other claim and no other force than what lay in those words to eventually triumph over, and be signally revenged on, his rebellious subjects.

Not that Charles had shown this temper too openly or exhibited any outward folly in his long dealings with Scots and Parliament. These complicated negotiations had shown him at his best ; he had been clever, learned, courteous, full of resource and firmness. The principle of his unalterable divine authority (the rock on which all the various hopes of a compromise were eventually shattered) he kept securely out of sight, being too proud to vaunt or rave. None the less it was there, and he was disdainfully storing up future vengeance for all of them—Scots, Presbyterians, Parliament men, army men, and Puritans—when the time should come for him to have done playing with them.

Such advisers as he had (the Queen was still the foremost) supported him in his views and in the means he took to advance his aims ; but now affairs were become so desperate that he held the bare semblance of kingship only by the consent and tolerance of the Parliament and the army. And it occurred to many, as it occurred now to Lord Digby, that an open peace with the rebels on the best terms to be got was the safest, indeed the only, policy to be pursued.

Lord Digby ventured now to say as much, in guarded and respectful terms, but with as much weight as his own volatile nature (only too much like Charles' own) would allow.

The King, resting one elbow on the window-sill, his chin in his hand and his eyes fixed on the passing glitter of the river, listened with impatience hardly disguised.

Soon he interrupted.

'Next thou wilt advise me to take the Covenant,' he said, 'or to accept the articles offered me at Uxbridge or Norwich!'

'Nay,' answered Lord Digby, with a flush on his fair face; 'but I do say there is no reliance to be placed on the Scots.'

'Wait,' returned Charles obstinately. 'I am of good hopes I can get an army from them without taking the Covenant, but on the mere promise to do so, and on some suspension of the bishops for three years or so—some compromise, worked secretly.'

'Is this plan laid?' asked Digby, who had not before heard of it.

'Yea, with my Lord Hamilton, and then I shall be able to hang up all these knavish rascals who come to me to bargain—to offer terms to *me*!'

'Meanwhile flatter them,' said my lord uneasily.

'I will flatter them,' returned Charles, with a flash in his worn eyes. 'I will talk of an Earldom to Cromwell—but I hope the Scots will be across the Border again before the patent is signed!'

Lord Digby was still not convinced; it seemed to him that this overture from a man of the weight and influence of Oliver Cromwell was not an advance to be lightly treated at this delicate stage of affairs.

'This man is fanatic,' he said. 'Your Majesty must remember that. I believe he standeth more for principle than party, more for his ideas than for his gain. A title may allure him, but it is a matter where one would need to be careful, sire. The bait must be skilfully played, or this fish will not rise.'

But Charles, though supremely constant on some points himself, found it impossible to believe in the constancy of those whose opinions were opposed to him: such as Cromwell were to him 'rebels,' and he gave them no other distinction.

'We shall see as to that,' he replied impatiently.

‘What did this man come here for, if not to get his price?’

‘Methinks he came on behalf of his policy,’ said Lord Digby doubtfully. ‘Maybe he would have the credit of reconciling Your Majesty with the Parliament, and after the peace some great place in the army or at your Council board.’

‘These high ambitions may be useful to us,’ replied Charles, with a bitter accent, ‘and therefore we will encourage them. Meanwhile, our hopes lie across the Border or across the sea—not in the rebel camp.’

He was then silent a little while and seemed, as had become usual with him, to have suddenly sunk into meditation or reverie: he would so do now in the midst of a conversation, the midst of a sentence even, as if his mind wandered suddenly from the present to the past, from the objects near to objects far away.

His face looked as if a veil had been dropped over it, so completely absent was his gaze, so utterly did an expression of melancholy hide and disguise all other.

Lord Digby stood watching him with bitter regret, with indignant sorrow, and as he gazed at this face which humiliation and anguish had distorted and altered as a terrible disease will distort and alter, as he noticed the grey locks, the thin, marred profile, the careless dress, a horrible conviction pressed on his heart with the certainty of a revelation: the King was ruined, broken, cast down; never would he be set up again, and these schemes and plots were mere baseless delusions. This conviction was as fleeting as it was strong, yet for one moment the faithful gentleman had seen his master as a thing utterly lost, and he turned his head away swiftly, for he loved the man as well as the King.

Charles turned from the window, his thin fingers still pressed to his face.

‘Go and see if any letters have come,’ he said.

Lord Digby did not say that immediately a courier came he was brought to the King, and therefore there could be no letters without his instant knowledge, but turned sadly to go on his errand; he knew the King was waiting always for letters from Henriette Marie in France

—imperious, passionate letters when they came, which he kissed every line of and sprinkled with the scalding tears of pride and love and regret.

As soon as Lord Digby had gone Charles drew from his doublet a gold chain, from which hung two diamond seals and a miniature in a case ornamented with whole pearls.

He touched the spring, the lid flew up, and he gazed at the little enamel which showed him the features of the Queen.

The painting had been done in her bridal days, and the artist's delicate skill had preserved for ever the seductive loveliness of her early youth ; she wore white, and her complexion was the tint of blonde pearl, her dark hair hung in fine tendrils on her brow, her large eyes were glancing at the spectator with a laughing look, round her neck was a string of large pearls, and on her bosom a bow of pink ribbon.

So he remembered her as he had first seen her, when, at the first glance, she had subdued him into her willing bondsman : before he met her he had been cold to women, and after meeting her there had been no other in the world for him.

He never reflected if this complete absorption in her, this submission to her will had been for his good ; he never recalled the many fatal mistakes she had advised, nor the damage done him by his unpopular Romanist Queen ; he never even admitted to himself that the one action of his life for which he felt bitter remorse, the abandonment of Strafford, was mainly committed to please her ; nor did it ever occur to him that many women would have stayed with him to the last, at all costs. The brightness of his devotion outshone all these things ; he saw her image good and brave and infinitely dear, and of all his losses the loss of her was paramount. As he thought of her, his longing half formed the resolution to quit all these turmoils and escape to France, abandoning for her sake his last chances of keeping his crown.

He might have come to this resolution before and carried it through had he not too well known her pride and her ambition.

‘ If you make an agreement with Parliament,’ she had

written, 'you are no king for me. I will never set foot in England again.'

And he had promised her that he would make no pact with the rebels unless she had first approved.

A light cloud passed over the sun, the sparkle died from the river, the glow from the sky, the warm tremble of light from the trees; and as Charles looked other clouds came up, in stately battalions, and darkened the whole west.

Lord Digby returned.

'No messenger, sire,' he said, 'no letters.'

'I did know it,' replied Charles, with a smile that cast scorn on himself; 'but I am my own fool, and beguile the time with mine own follies.'

CHAPTER III

LIEUT.-GENERAL CROMWELL, ROYALIST

'THOU goest too often to Hampton Court,' said Major Harrison. 'I say it to thy face.'

'Thou mayst say it before any man,' returned Cromwell mildly, 'and do no harm.'

'If you will have any influence with the army you will go no more,' continued Harrison.

'Ay!' said Cromwell, with the same patience; 'but I think neither of my influence with the army nor of any other thing, friends, but of what the Lord hath put it in my heart to do for His service and the peace of these times.'

So saying, he laid down a little manual of gun drill, the pages of which he had been turning over, and relit his pipe.

The scene was the guard-room of the army's headquarters at Putney. Cromwell had been to London that morning to see his family, who were now established in a mansion in Drury Lane, and his buff coat and his falling boots were still dusty with the dust of the return ride.

Fairfax was in the room and the preacher, Hugh Peters. The bolder Harrison voiced their opinions when he told Cromwell that he was becoming too intimate with the

King and too firm a supporter of the royal pretensions ; but Fairfax, from a natural reserve, and Peters, because he hoped the Lieutenant-General would make an adequate defence, were silent.

‘ Little did I ever think,’ cried Harrison, pacing heavily about the room, ‘ that thou wouldst become the consort of tyrants, the frequenter of the strange children, whose mouth talketh of vanity, and whose right hand is a hand of iniquity ! ’

Cromwell raised his calm eyes from his long clay pipe.

‘ No man will enjoy his possessions in peace until the King hath his rights again,’ he said, ‘ and I make no disguise from you nor from any that I am doing my utmost to bring about a good peace with His Majesty. For what other reason did any of us take up arms ? ’

‘ Ay,’ assented Sir Thomas Fairfax hastily, ‘ and the Parliament and the city of London are pressing for a settlement.’

‘ My visits to Hampton Palace,’ continued Cromwell, ‘ and my communings with the King have had this one object—a good peace.’

‘ If thou canst bring Charles Stewart to a good peace—and *make him keep it*—thou hast more than mortal skill,’ said Harrison.

‘ What wouldst thou in this realm ? ’ asked Cromwell, glancing up at him with a gleam of humour. ‘ A republic ? ’

The other three were silent at this ; even among the extremists the idea of totally abolishing the kingship was scarcely murmured.

‘ Well, then,’ said Cromwell, with a little smile, glancing round the three silent faces, ‘ a treaty with the King is the only means to get us out of our present imbroglio, is it not ? Now we have conquered His Majesty, we must make terms with him.’

‘ You never will,’ cried Hugh Peters vehemently. ‘ He is false and false, unstable and creeping in his ways—even while you confer with him he is arranging to bring in the Scots again or murdering Papists from Ireland or the French ! ’

‘ How do you know ? ’ asked the Lieutenant-General, turning sharply in his chair.

Mr. Peters glanced at Major Harrison, who replied—

‘It is true that I have my finger in some plots the King hath in hand. His agents meet at the Blue Boar in Holborn, and he hath a whole service of secret couriers travelling between England, the Scots, and France. As yet I have no letters, no absolute proofs in my possession, but I do not think to lack them long.’

‘Have you long known of this, Sir Thomas?’ asked Cromwell, rising.

‘A week or so,’ replied the General; ‘but I have not given it overmuch attention. If one listened to all the rumours of plots one’s brain would be confounded.’

‘I have men in disguise at the Blue Boar,’ said Harrison stubbornly, ‘and soon I hope to prove my suspicions correct.’

‘Why, if they are,’ said Cromwell calmly, ‘then I shall change my policy.’

‘Thou art all of a fatalist,’ remarked Harrison grimly; ‘there is no ruffling thee.’

The Lieutenant-General picked up his gloves and hat and riding-stock.

‘Can I alter God’s decrees that I should fret because of them?’ he answered earnestly. ‘I am but the flail in the hand of the thresher. The Lord’s will be done on me and on His Majesty, who are both the instruments of His unsearchable judgments on these lands.’

He saluted the General respectfully, but left without further speech. He might call himself the instrument of the Lord: it was clear that he did not consider himself the instrument of Sir Thomas Fairfax.

He seemed, indeed, quietly but fully conscious that he and he alone could move the army (which at present still held the balance of power), and that he, therefore, and no other, was become the arbiter of these realms.

When he left the guard-room he sent his servant for his son-in-law, Henry Ireton, who soon joined him; the two mounted and, through the October sun, rode to Hampton Court.

They exchanged little conversation on the way, partly because each thoroughly understood the other, and partly because their minds were full of busy thoughts.

The King, who was still treated with formality and respect, with his own servants and his own friends about him, made no delay in seeing them. He had lately had several interviews with Cromwell, with Fairfax, with Ireton, and walking about Wolsey's groves and alleys had discussed with them, through more than one summer and autumn afternoon, the prospects before England.

It was in the garden, in one of the beautiful walks of yellowing oak and beech that sloped to the river, that he received them now.

As usual his manner was gentle and gracious, as usual he kept his seat (he was resting on a wooden bench) and did not uncover, though the two Generals doffed their hats : power still paid this respect to tradition.

'Sir,' said Cromwell at once, 'I should have waited on you sooner, but I have been sick of an imposthume in the head. But now I am here I have weighty matters to say, and I would have Your Majesty give a keen ear to my words.'

'Am I not ever,' said Charles, with a faint smile, 'attentive to your words?'

'I know not,' replied Cromwell, with his plain outspokenness. 'I cannot read the heart of Your Majesty,' and he looked at him straightly.

With the tip of his cane Charles disturbed the first little dead gold leaves which lay at his feet.

'Ah,' he replied slowly, 'so you have weighty things to say?'

He had long known that his conferences with the leaders of the army must come to a crisis and a plain issue soon ; it had not been his purpose to force this moment until his plans were all smoothly arranged, but now he was ready enough. As usual he had his points clear, his feelings under command, as usual his manner was gentle, contained, courteous, his mind alert and watchful ; yet there was a weariness in his face and voice that all his art could not disguise, as he came again to the old wretched business of speaking his enemies fair, as he once more engaged in the endless game of negotiation, proposal and counter-proposal, which he never intended should come to anything.

The keen eyes of Commissary-General Ireton detected

the shudder of reluctance, almost repulsion, which Charles so instantly repressed.

'We will be short, Your Majesty,' he said, 'and it is not our intention to ask you for more audiences. The army doth not like our meeting. All must be settled in this coming together.'

Charles glanced up at the two men standing before him as John Pym had stood before him once in another of his royal gardens—Pym was dead, but his principles were alive indeed; Charles thought that if the old Puritan was in any hell which allowed him a glimpse of the earth he must be grinning derisively at this scene now.

'We have had,' said Cromwell, not waiting for Charles to speak, 'conferences, rendezvous, councils of war, much running to and fro between the army and the Parliament, many talks between ourselves and Your Majesty. Surely this thing must come to an end. The country is without a government, and many extreme and fanatic men do seize the time to unsettle the mind of the vulgar with fierce, empty words.'

He paused a moment, then added, looking at the King intently and openly, and speaking with almost mournful seriousness—

'Your Majesty knows what the country must have—are you prepared to grant us these desires?'

Charles looked at him with a steadiness equal to his own.

'And if I say I am?' he replied. 'What then?'

Both men were speaking with a directness usually foreign to them.

'Then,' said Cromwell, 'you may be in Whitehall within the week, sir. The army will escort you there.'

Charles could hardly disguise the leap of exultation that shook his heart at this splendid chance, which, after being dangled before him so long, was at length definitely offered him.

'Sir,' added the Lieutenant-General, 'I make no disguise from you that there are many in the army not of my mind—it is rumoured that Your Majesty hath secret dealings with the Scots, the French, the Dutch——'

'If the English are loyal to me,' replied Charles, 'wherefore should I need foreign aid? These tales fly like thistle-

down before the first autumn wind—when we are in London, sir, I will listen to, and satisfy, all demands.'

'Is that a pledge?' demanded Cromwell. 'Is your Majesty sincere with me?'

Charles rose.

'What have I to gain by insincerity?' he said; and again his cane stirred the drifting shrivelled leaves.

'And I must speak my side,' he added. 'It is my wish to show you that loyalty may bring more profit and honour than rebellion.'

'What manner of profit?' asked Cromwell. 'If you mean personal profit, why, I am well enough.' ('Ay, with my Lord Worchester's lands,' thought Charles bitterly.) 'Two of my wenches are wed, my eldest son is settled, the younger making good progress, for my other little maids and their mother I can provide—what more should I want? For Henry Ireton I can say the same.'

'Yet I can gild this honourable prosperity,' replied the King. 'When my Lord Essex died, his title—his title died with him—you, methinks, are of the first Earl's house——'

'Ah!' cried Cromwell sharply, and flushed all over his face and neck.

'Oliver Cromwell may take the rank of Thomas Cromwell, who was also the terror and the help of a king,' continued Charles, with smiling lips and narrowed eyes.

The blood was still staining the Lieutenant-General's face; his forehead was crimson up to the thick brown hair; he looked on the ground in a fashion that was embarrassed, almost stricken.

'I have not offered enough,' thought Charles; aloud he said—

'When I am in Whitehall I will sign the patent, and then the Earl of Essex may command me to further service.'

Still Cromwell did not speak.

'Thou clod, dost thou not understand!' cried the King in his heart.

He spoke again.

'And thy son-in-law, Henry Ireton here—he also I would raise——'

Cromwell interrupted, but in a confused and stammering fashion.

'Sir—you have mistaken—I am no cadet of the first Earl of Essex's family—nay—or so remote; it matters not—I never thought of it—this was not what I came to speak of—yet what I would have said is gone from me.' His head fell on his breast despondently; he made a hopeless little gesture with his gloved right hand. 'Let it pass,' he finished.

'For me,' said Henry Ireton, 'I would that Your Majesty had not spoken of this.'

Charles could not keep all scorn from his smile as he replied—

'We will discuss these things at Westminster.'

Cromwell raised his head and gazed into the King's pale, composed face.

'I do ask Your Majesty,' he said, and in his deep voice was a note of intense appeal, 'to be sincere with me.'

'I am sincere with you, General Cromwell,' replied Charles.

A light gust of wind shook the oak branches and more leaves drifted downwards.

'To-morrow I will return with General Fairfax and some other officers,' said Cromwell, 'with whom Your Majesty may finally speak.' He seemed about to take his leave, hesitated, then, as if a sudden impulse had shaken him, he turned again and addressed Charles.

'Not for my sake,' he said, 'nor for any light reason—but for thy soul's sake that when thou comest before the living God thou mayst have no treachery or falsehood in the scale against thee, deal fairly with me now. There thou shalt wear no crown to give thee courage, and no courtier shall flatter thee—therefore, sir, bethink thee, and tell me plainly if I may trust thee.'

'I have said it,' replied Charles.

For a second Cromwell was silent; then he and Ireton took a formal leave and left the Palace grounds.

When they were mounted and clear of the iron gates and the stone lions, Ireton spoke.

'Wilt thou put that man up in Whitehall again? See

how his mind runs on little things—he did offer us bribes as if we were soldiers deserting for higher pay.’

‘That went to my soul,’ replied Cromwell simply. ‘I thought he took me for an honest man—but it pleased the Lord to mortify me, and I must not murmur. As for the King—yea, I will put him on his heights again, for that is the only way to peace.’

They rode silently until they came within sight of Putney, and there they were met by Major Harrison, who, riding, came out of the village and joined them at the village green.

‘News,’ he said abruptly, with a grim smile and triumphant eyes—‘news from “The Blue Boar.”’

‘Ay?’ replied Cromwell quietly.

Harrison turned his horse about and rode beside the others; the three slowed to a walking pace.

‘You had not left the guard-room ten minutes,’ said Harrison, ‘before my man arrived from London, all in a reek. He had found and arrested the King’s secret messenger, and out of his saddle ripped these’—he held up a packet of papers—‘secret letters to the Queen,’ he added triumphantly, ‘and as fatal as those papers captured after Naseby!’

Ireton gave a passionate exclamation, but Cromwell said—

‘What is in them?’

‘Much treason,’ replied Harrison succinctly. ‘He tells his wife he will never make a peace with either army or Parliament, that he is deluding both while he raises a force in Scotland and Ireland, in which countries Hamilton and Ormonde intrigue for him. He begs her to get a loan from the Pope to raise a foreign army—and he promises,’ added Harrison dryly, ‘that, when he hath his day again, those two rebels, Cromwell and Ireton, shall both be hanged.’

‘Doth he? doth he?’ said Cromwell; he held out his hand and took the papers.

One glance at their contents confirmed Ireton’s summary—the whole was in the King’s known hand.

Oliver Cromwell turned his horse and rode back to Hampton Court.

CHAPTER IV

THE KING AT BAY

WHEN Cromwell returned to the Palace the King had already gone to his supper.

'I will wait,' said the Lieutenant-General; and in the little room with the linen-pattern carving in the grey-coloured walls, the portrait of Mary Tudor, the red lacquer desk, and the oriel window, where he had first spoken with Charles, he waited.

Between his buff coat and his shirt lay the packet of papers ripped from the saddle of the secret messenger in the stables of 'The Blue Boar'—papers which Charles believed to be across the Channel by now.

Oliver Cromwell waited while nearly half an hour ticked away on the dial of the gilt bracket clock, and then came Lord Digby to say that His Majesty would not be disturbed again to-night; Charles had still the unconquerable pride of royalty; he would not be summoned to meet his enemies at any hour they chose to name; the state with which he was still surrounded perhaps deluded him into thinking he could behave as he had behaved at Whitehall.

If so, the veil of his dignity was now rent in such a way that it could never be patched again; Cromwell, with a manner there was no mistaking, the manner of the master, repeated his demand for an instant audience of His Majesty.

Lord Digby withdrew, and five minutes later the Puritan soldier was ushered into the old, now disused, state chamber of Henry VIII., hung with fine Flemish tapestries representing the 'Seven deadly Sins' and lit by mullioned windows looking on the Park.

Charles was already there, walking up and down; he had changed his dress since Cromwell had left him, and now wore black velvet with cherry-coloured points and gold tags; his fingers played nervously with the long gold chain which thrice circled his chest.

In the light, already slightly dim, of the large room, the

grey look of his face and hair was more apparent ; it was almost as if some faded carving had been joined to a living body, so extraordinarily lifeless and without light was that immobile face framed in the long, waving, colourless locks.

But in the eyes, swollen and lined, an intense vitality gleamed ; the dark pupils sparkled with force and emotion under the tired, drooping lids as Charles stopped in his pacing and turned about to face Cromwell.

‘ I had not expected this,’ he said, with a haughtiness which seemed to disguise some straining passion. ‘ What more have we to say, sir ? Methought you were to come to-morrow.’

‘ To-morrow might have been too late,’ said Cromwell. He spoke in his usual quiet, almost melancholy, fashion ; his heavy voice held the usual deep note, enthusiastic, mournful.

‘ Too late for what ? ’ asked Charles, still endeavouring to conciliate his powerful foe, and now, he hoped, ally, still barely able to conceal his angry pride at the lack of ceremony with which he was treated, the manner in which this man came before him, his great disgust and repulsion at having to deal with such fellows at all.

‘ Get you gone to-night from Hampton, sir,’ said Cromwell, ‘ to whatever place seems good—here you shall no longer be safe.’

‘ Ah,’ cried Charles, ‘ is this the end of all your wily advances ? I am not safe ! ’

‘ Because I cannot protect you when what Major Harrison knows is spread abroad among the army.’

The King’s right hand left his chain ; he pressed his fingers over his heart ; on the black velvet they looked thin and white beyond nature.

‘ The hand of God is against you,’ said Cromwell sombrely. ‘ He does not mean that you shall again rule in this land. I would have made treaty with you as the Gibeonites made with David—and I would not ask from you the lives of seven, as they asked for the sons of Saul, but only your own word pledged openly. But you could not keep it, but dealt with the children of Belial and all the array of the ungodly.’

Charles took one delicate step backwards.

'These are mighty words,' he said.

'They are mighty doings,' replied Cromwell. 'Not of mean things or small things or the things concerning one man or another am I speaking, but of great things, the displeasure of God on this wretched land, the means we must take to revoke His judgment. . . . Much blood hath been shed,' he added, with a sudden flash in his voice, 'but not that which must be before we find peace.'

'I know not of what you speak,' muttered the King.

'You very well know,' replied Cromwell, and through the obscure web of his words a meaning of passion, of force and fire did gleam, like gold or flame. 'You know what you have done. How you have deceived and gone crookedly. But God is not mocked. Hath He not said, "Though they dig into Hell thence shall mine hand take them, though they climb up into Heaven thence shall I pull them down"? And out of darkness and secrecy hath He revealed your designs that you may not bring more evil upon England.'

'Of what dost thou accuse the King?' asked Charles.

'Of high treason,' replied Cromwell—'of treason towards God and England.'

A step further back moved Charles, so that his shoulders touched and ruffled the tapestry.

'By what authority do you use this boldness?' he asked.

'My authority is from within,' answered the Puritan. 'I can satisfy men of my authority. I am not afraid. I see that in treating with you I have committed folly, but that is over. God will find another way. Get from Hampton, under what excuse you may. I would not, sir, have the army do you a mischief.'

'I will,' replied Charles, 'get as far as may be from the violence of insulting rebels—I will withdraw myself from my subjects until they remember their duty to their King.'

'In what way,' demanded Cromwell, 'hast thou fulfilled thy duty to God or to His people?'

'I have endured much!' cried Charles, in a sharp voice. 'But till now I have been spared open insolence!'

Unmoved and unblenching the Lieutenant-General regarded him.

'Sir,' he replied, 'you may yet hear worse words than any I have said, and may have to bear a rougher speech. I did not come to rail, but to tell you that I am now persuaded there can be no treaty or understanding between you and us. Sir, others advised me of this awhile ago, but I would not listen. But now the hand of God is plainly discoverable—your plots and subterfuges are revealed, sir, your secret letters to the Queen are known.'

Charles, whose quick mind had been reviewing all the possible disasters that could have befallen, who had been wondering which of his intrigues had been unveiled, was not prepared for a catastrophe so complete as the discovery of his secret correspondence with his wife, which revealed, not one, but all of his complicated plots.

As Cromwell told him at last the cause of his sudden estrangement, he felt at once a shock and a premonition chill his heart; he remembered quite clearly what had been in his last letter to the Queen, and the statement that he had made in his irritation and humiliation regarding Cromwell and Ireton, and he saw that another golden chance had gone, and that he had lost for ever the help of the army which he had sacrificed so much pride to gain.

But he faced this misfortune as he had faced so many others, with unflinching courage and dignity.

'You pretend to deal with me as your King,' he said, 'but you treat me as your prisoner. I am spied upon, and my very letters opened. . . . There is no more to be said.'

Cromwell did not deny the charge, as he might well have done, since Major Harrison, and not he, had tracked and arrested the King's messenger.

'My hopes of you are dead,' he merely said. 'I would have you leave Hampton, for I know not what the army may do, and if they take you to Whitehall now, sir, it will not be as a king, but as a prisoner.'

'I am well used to that treatment,' replied Charles, with hot bitterness, 'nor have I looked for any other at the hands of rebellious fanatics. Didst thou think,' he added, with the full force of that fury and scorn he had so long concealed breaking the bounds of his fitful prudence and his steady courtesy, 'that I ever regarded *thee* as my friend?'

'I would have been so, sincerely,' replied Cromwell,

with his unruffled melancholy calm. 'I and Ireton risked our prestige with the army to make conferences and debates with you, but it hath been as if one should pour water into a sieve. I would have overlooked much—even the insult you put on me to-day when you tried to buy me with a feather for my cap, when I was offering myself to you with no thought but the good of this realm. So cheaply did you hold Pym, so cheaply will you always hold honest men, it seems—and I, sir, tell you plainly that I have done with you. I will find other ways. Not through you can peace come to England, I do now perceive it. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." You must go on to your fate, sir, as I shall to mine; but look for no ally in me or in the army, for henceforth there can be no treaty between Your Majesty and us. My cousin, Colonel Whalley, shall remain here to look after your security; as for me, you shall not see me again, or in a manner very different. As for what may become of you or your estate, of that I wash my hands of—the Lord deal with you.'

'Amen,' said Charles sternly, 'and may He judge between you and me. Between me who have kept His ancient statutes and upheld His Church, and you who have defied and blasphemed both.'

'God is neither in statutes nor in churches,' replied Cromwell, 'but in the innermost recesses of the spirits and the secret depths of the heart, and these sanctuaries have you polluted and defiled, with tyranny and falseness and sly and untruthful dealing.'

He took a step towards the door; a sudden weariness seemed to have overtaken him, or a wave of the weakness from his recent illness; he looked, in his dusty clothes, like a rider beaten with fatigue, a traveller exhausted after a long journey, his chin sank on his linen collar; his broad shoulders were bowed, and his step was at once heavy and uncertain.

Charles remained white, rigid in pose and expression as when Cromwell entered the chamber; the shadows were swiftly closing round them and all sharp lines and fine colours were blurred; through the one open window a breeze came, which lightly stirred the dusty tapestry and shook it in faint ripples from top to bottom.

When he had reached the door, Cromwell turned and spoke again.

'Thou hast, sir, lost as good a chance as we are ever like to get of a fair settlement, and lost it through falseness and folly.' He spoke with passion, but it was a passion of regret, not of vexation or wrath. 'A good night.'

The King, without turning his head or moving, stood as if he dismissed an unwelcome suitor from an audience, he showed an indifference that was stronger than contempt and an insulting coolness and absence of passion.

So, with no other word on either side, they parted, and Oliver rode back to Putney, weary with disappointment and chagrin, though his inmost prescience knew, and had known, that this disappointment and chagrin had been from the first foredoomed, that in ever dealing with the King at all he had been preparing the failure that had disclosed itself to-night; as he reflected on the whole business, his stern common sense laughed at the idealism which had led him astray; how could he have ever hoped to have clipped a king to *his* pattern out of Charles?

The delusion was over; he asked himself, as he rode through the fresh autumn twilight, what was to take its place?

If the King could not be trusted—what then? Some of the bold words of Thomas Harrison flashed into his mind. Must they, could they, do without a king at all?

Oliver Cromwell did not think so; he was never a Republican: order and system were lovely to him, and both were involved, in his English heart, with the idea of a steadfast though constrained monarchy.

In anything else (where, indeed, was the model for anything else to be found in Europe, save perhaps in the peculiar constitution, founded under peculiar circumstances, of the United Provinces?) he foresaw the elements of constant anarchy, constant revolution. . . .

Yet he had done with the King—finished with him with that complete definiteness of which his resolutions were supremely capable.

So Cromwell strove with his thoughts during the short ride to Putney where all the chiefs of the army were already in conclave.

Alone in the uncared-for splendour of another monarch the unhappy King stood, motionless, as his enemy had left him, and tried to measure the extent of his misfortune and to readjust his shattered plans.

He was still, as ever, incredulous of his ultimate defeat, but never before had he been so utterly at a loss for present action. The army was lost to him, that was clear ; neither the Scots nor the Parliament were ready to receive him, the Queen had not been able to raise the foreign army, his son-in-law, the Prince of Orange, had been prevented by the States-General from sending troops to his assistance, Ormonde could do nothing in Ireland—that country was indeed lost to the royal cause, since the miserable affair of the Earl of Glamorgan—and Hamilton seemed powerless to fight the Campbell faction at Edinburgh.

‘What shall I do?’ muttered Charles. ‘What shall I do?’

His thoughts turned with even deeper longing than usual to the Queen in her exile ; he believed that he might forsake everything and go to her ; two things restrained him, sheer pride and the thought of his two children, the Princess Elisabeth and the Duke of Gloucester, who were in the hands of the Parliament and whom he would have to leave behind.

The Duke of York had already escaped to France, but the figures of these little children rose up and restrained his flight.

Besides, he must stand by his crown . . . but he would not stay at Hampton—his own enemy had warned him.

But where to go—in all my three realms where to go?

Several days he waited in his usual indecision, then, miserable, harassed, uncertain, torn by a thousand perplexities, he and his few companions crept one night down the back stairs, came out on to the riverside, and went forth aimlessly, with no plan nor purpose, with nothing but schemes as wild as will-o'-the-wisps to light the dimness and confusions of their future.

CHAPTER V

LIEUT.-GENERAL CROMWELL, REPUBLICAN

IN a room of the house where Oliver Cromwell had moved his family from Ely, a mansion in Drury Lane, one of the least pretentious in that fashionable street, but stately and comfortable, two women were sitting over the ruddy fire which lit and cheered the close of the short winter day.

The contrast between them was as marked as any contrast could be, yet something in their personalities knit together and blended as if beneath their great differences there was an underlying likeness—the likeness of the same breed and birth.

The elder lady was towards the close of life—eighty, perhaps, or more ; her face and person were delicate, her lap full of delicate embroidery, out of which her fine fingers drew a fine needle and thread.

She wore a grey tabinet gown ; a white cap and white strings enclosed her fragile face, white linen enfolded her shoulders and bosom, and long white cuffs reached from her wrist to her elbow.

A housewife's case and a small Bible hung by cords to her waist ; she had nothing of gold or silver but her worn wedding ring, yet she gave the impression of something high and fine and aristocratic.

She sat in a deep, cushioned chair with a hooded top ; the failing light had baffled the eyes that were still so keen, and the needlework was dropped on her lap.

At her feet, on a small footstool, sat her grandchild, she who had brightened the house at Ely with her balls of holly berries, her red ribbons, her laughter, and her songs, and who now brightened the finer town house when she visited there ; she was no longer an inmate of her father's home, for, though only seventeen, Elisabeth was a year married and now Mrs. Claypole.

Neither in dress nor manner was she a Puritan ; her lavender-blue silk gown, flowing open on a lemon-coloured petticoat, her deep falling collar and cuffs of Flemish lace,

the bow of rose colour at her breast and in her hair, her white sarcenet shoes with the silver buckles, the long ringlets which escaped the pearl comb and fell on her shoulders, even her piquant bright face, with eyes slightly languishing and mouth slightly wilful, seemed more to belong to the now exiled court of Henriette Marie than to the household of the leader of the Roundhead army.

Yet there was nothing frivolous in the appearance of Elisabeth Claypole ; her prettiness had a pensive cast, her glance often a seriousness unusual for her age, and if she sometimes showed a pride, a vanity, or an impatience, impossible to her sweetly austere sister, Bridget Ireton, she was not less noble and pious, brave and good, and perhaps her deeper tenderness, her greater gaiety, her warmer love of life were not such sins in the eyes of the God whom she had always been taught to fear ; yet sins her father called them, though he knew they made her lovable, though he found her sweeter than Bridget, who was gentle perfection.

Sitting here now, in the closing day, with the firelight flushing her delicate clothes and her sensitive face, and the shadows encroaching on her hair, here, with the cheerful noises of London without and the cheerful atmosphere of home within, she talked to her grandmother of the one subject every one must talk of this wondrous winter—the King's bewildered flight from Hampton, his aimless two days' riding, his final turning to the Isle of Wight and giving himself up to the Governor there, Colonel Hammond, whom he had reason to believe was loyalist at heart.

Yet here again the King had been, as ever, unfortunate ; Robert Hammond, tempted at first to take the King where he wished, yet remained true to his trust, and the unhappy Stewart was again a prisoner, now at Carisbrooke, kept more strictly than before—and a portentous silence hung over the nation ; English, Scots, Presbyterians, Independents, Parliamentarians, the army, the Royalists—all seemed waiting—' Waiting for what ? ' asked Elisabeth Claypole, voicing the question England was asking.

' For the Lord to show His will towards this poor kingdom,' said Mrs. Cromwell simply. ' Surely He will dispose it all to mercy.'

‘Mercy?’ repeated the young girl thoughtfully. ‘I see little mercy abroad. Much blood and bitterness—but no mercy.’

‘At least,’ said the old gentlewoman composedly, ‘His Majesty is mewed up, and that should be a step towards the settlement of these tangled affairs.’

‘Alas, poor King!’ murmured the youngest Elisabeth (it was her mother and her grandmother’s name). ‘Alas! alas!’

‘Why dost thou say alas?’ asked Mrs. Cromwell calmly. ‘Dost thou not recall what thy father said in the House the other day when he moved that no more addresses should be sent to the King, nor any dealings made with him, under pain of high treason? He put his hand on his sword, thy father did, and he said, quoting Holy Writ—“Thou shalt not suffer a hypocrite to reign——”’

‘He said not so much a month ago,’ replied Elisabeth; ‘then he was all for a good peace with His Majesty, saying—how could any man come quietly to his own save by that?’

‘Thou knowest,’ returned the old lady, who had much of the strength and melancholy of her son in her calm demeanour, ‘that all that is changed.’

‘Will there be another war?’ murmured Elisabeth Claypole, looking dreamily into the fire.

‘That is a matter for men. . . . Be not so grave, dear heart, the Lord hath us all in His keeping.’

‘My father,’ replied the girl, ‘hath been grave of late—during all my visit. He thinketh affairs are dark, I believe.’

‘Not only affairs of the kingdom weigh on him, Elisabeth—something his own do oppress him. The Parliament settlements are yet indefinite, and then there is your brother Richard’s marriage. It does not please your father that he should be so deep in love as to leave the Life Guards. And then this Dorothea Mayor’s father requireth settlements, hard for your father to give as things now stand—all this weighs with him and puts him in anxieties and silences.’

At the end of this speech, Mrs. Cromwell, either exhausted from so many words or from the thoughts her own

explanation had conjured up, sighed and leant back in her chair, dropping her chin on the immaculate whiteness of her cambric bosom, as her son would sink his on his breast when he was thoughtful or oppressed.

'Richard,' said Elisabeth Claypole in that soft, eager voice which was always ready to plead for and to praise every one, 'is not suited for the army—he never cared for it.'

'Cannot you see,' replied Elisabeth Cromwell almost sharply, 'what a disappointment that is for your father?'

'He loveth Oliver,' whispered Oliver's sister, and her eyes swam in tears. 'Oliver would have been a good soldier.'

'He loved Robert more,' returned the grandmother. 'Robert was the first born. His eldest son. Richard could never be as either Robert or Oliver to him; yet he will be loving and just to Richard.' That sense of the presence of the dead that the hushed mention of them seems to so often evoke, as if they were never far, and at the sound of love and regret hovered near, filled the darkening room. Both the grandmother and sister seemed to see the bright ardent figure of the young cornet, whose life had burst forth so fiercely into action amid the whirling events of war, and had been stilled so suddenly by a hideous disease in an insignificant garrison, and was now forgotten save by these one or two who had loved him.

Elisabeth Claypole remembered; she remembered his excitement, their mother's instructions, the cordials and balms he had taken with him, the fine shirts she had helped stitch and pack, his new sword that had looked so big to her childish eyes—the farewells—the letters. . . .

Elisabeth Cromwell remembered; she remembered his farewell visit, how she had blessed him and he had knelt before her with her hand on his smooth fair head . . . and his tallness and straightness and slenderness, and all his bright new bravery of war array. . . .

'Ah well,' she said softly. 'Ah well,' and her mind wandered off to her own youth, and it seemed to her as if she had indeed been living a long time . . . almost too long.

'Light the candles, my love, my dear,' she said. 'It is sad to sit in the dark.'

As her granddaughter rose, the door opened and Oliver Cromwell entered.

His coming was a surprise; he was not now often in London, save when he had to speak at Westminster. He had lately been at Hereford, and they had not expected his return so soon.

The sincere warmth of his welcome might have pleased any man, however weary, and his gravity lifted under it for a while, but when he had kissed them both and come to the fire and warmed his hands, silence came over him, as if the melancholy had closed over and clouded him again. His mother, from her hooded chair, gazed at his powerful, yet drooping figure, and the presence of the younger Oliver seemed more insistent.

Elisabeth Claypole had gone to fetch the candles.

'We were speaking of Oliver,' said Mrs. Cromwell.

Her son turned to look down at her.

'He is with the Lord,' he answered gravely. 'He was a man—and took a man's fate doing man's work.'

A little fall of silence, then Cromwell spoke again—

'Do you think of Robert sometimes, mother?'

'I knew, I knew,' murmured the old gentlewoman. 'He was your love.'

'He was a child,' replied Cromwell, with infinite tenderness, with infinite regret. 'A little, useless child. Dying so, he remains a child—never higher than my shoulder. My eldest born. Oliver laughed when he did go, for joy to die in God's service, but Robert wept. Ay, they at Felsted told me he wept because I was not there to take his hand in the sharpness of his passing. Oh, that went to my heart, my innermost heart . . . but God saved me.'

The young Elisabeth returned, followed by the servant with the two branched candlesticks of brass which stood on the black polished table, where they reflected their full shining length.

With a shudder the Lieutenant-General roused himself and turned to face the room.

'What hast thou been doing?' asked Elisabeth Claypole when the maid had gone.

'It would not please thee to know,' he answered sombrely.

Now the room was lit she noticed his pallor, his heavy air.

'Thou art tired, father,' she cried.

'Ay—tired—tired—bring me a glass of wine, dearest.' He turned round again to the fire and said abruptly, 'There hath been a mutiny in the army. A rebellious meeting at Corkbush field—these levellers it was—but I did stamp it out; we must have no disaffection in the army.'

'A meeting?' exclaimed his daughter, taking a bell-mouthed glass from the sideboard; 'but it is ended—how?'

'They drew lots,' replied Cromwell, 'and one was shot. One Arnald—a brave man.'

'Oh, father!' cried Mrs. Claypole. 'More blood—more misery!'

'It had to be,' said Cromwell. 'Dost thou think I love it?' He made an effort to shake off his preoccupation and his gloom, 'Come, come, this is no news for thee.'

He turned again to gaze very tenderly at her as she came with wine on a silver salver.

'Oh, vanity and carnal mind!' he cried, pulling at the ribbons on her sleeve; 'thy sister Ireton doth think that thou art too much given to worldliness! Yet seek ye the Lord and ye shall find Him,' he added, with a sudden grave smile.

'Sir, I would,' she replied earnestly. 'Let not my ways deceive you, I am very humble at heart.'

'I do believe it,' he said.

He drank his wine slowly. He asked where his wife was (he had learnt below that she was abroad), and was told that she was with Lady Wharton.

'She did not expect me,' he said half-wistfully. 'I wish that I had chanced to find her. Since I am so much away I would have all round me when I am at home.'

'She will be in soon,' said his mother, gathering up her fine sewing with an air of regret, for the candlelight was not strong enough for her to see the minute stitches.

Elisabeth crept up to her father, and taking his sword hand, caressed it.

'What of the King?' she asked.

'The King is at Carisbrooke,' he replied.

She gave a deep sigh.

'How will it end, my father?'

'How should we have that knowledge yet?'

'The poor King!' she exclaimed. 'I am sorry for the poor King!'

Cromwell was silent.

'Tell me,' said Elisabeth, creeping closer to him, 'will there be another war?'

'God forbend,' he answered gravely.

'Then what will the King do?' she insisted.

'Thou art very tender towards the King.'

'I am sorry for him, surely. And I have heard thee say—he must have his rights again.'

He hath forfeited his rights,' said Cromwell, glooming. 'He is a hypocrite.'

'Once you were his friend,' said Elisabeth Claypole; 'is that over? Why, Major Harrison even called you royalist.'

'Yes, it is over,' returned her father, 'and now you may sooner call me republican—a name I did use to hate. The King is not one to be trusted, neither is he fortunate. God is against him, and will not have him raised up again; even as the Lord's judgment went forth against Tyrus, so hath it gone forth against Charles Stewart. What hath God said—"I shall bring thee down with them that descend to the pit—and thou shalt be no more—thou shalt be sought for, but never shalt thou be found!"'

'But what wilt thou do with the tyrant?' asked Mrs. Cromwell.

'He is not my prisoner, nor am I his judge,' replied Cromwell, with sudden vehemence. 'Ask *me* not what his fate will be! Ask me not to pity the King—"he that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity, and the rod of his anger shall fail."'

He crossed to the sideboard and set his glass there.

Elisabeth Claypole stood sad and thoughtful by her grandmother's chair; Cromwell came and kissed her delicate forehead.

'Thy brother's marriage treaty sticks,' he said pleasantly. 'I must go and write to Mr. Mayor, and cast up what higher settlements I can offer.'

'He demands too much,' declared Mrs. Cromwell.

‘Nay, he is prudent ; but I have two wenches still to provide for—farewell for a moment.’ He had gone again.

‘The affairs of men !’ muttered the old gentlewoman. ‘Well, well.’

Elisabeth Claypole, too, felt sad ; she, too, felt helpless in a busy world that did not need her. She returned to her stool and began to fold up her grandmother’s work ; both of them, being women, were used to loneliness.

CHAPTER VI

PRESTON ROUT

CHARLES was a prisoner at Carisbrooke, more strictly guarded than ever before, but not any less dangerous to Parliament or the disrupting forces which stood for Parliament. In spite of everything they still tried to come to an agreement with him, for the confusion of the kingdom was beyond words, beyond any one man’s brain to grasp and cope with, and all turned to the King and the tradition behind the King as the one stable thing in a whirl of chaos.

Charles thought that they, traitors and rebels as they were, were speeding to their own doom. Outwardly he played with them as he had done before ; he referred himself, he said, wholly to them. Meanwhile he was sowing the seeds of another Civil War.

He had come to an agreement with the Scots whereby they were to unite with the English royalists against the Parliament, and he on his side was to suppress Sectaries and Independents and to establish presbytery for three years, himself retaining the Anglican form of worship. This agreement was signed secretly, wrapped in lead, and buried in the garden of Carisbrooke Castle.

Royalist risings broke out all over the country, particularly in Wales ; mutinies were frequent in the still undisciplined, unpaid army ; the struggle between Presbyterian and Independent was as sharp as it had ever been. Hamilton triumphed over the Argyll faction in the Scottish Parliament, raised an army 40,000 strong, and prepared

to march across the Border 'to deliver the King from Sectaries.' Part of the fleet had revolted, gone to Holland, fetched the young Prince of Wales and Rupert, and was buccaneering round Yarmouth Roads. In Ireland the Marquess of Ormonde and the papal Nuncio were coming to some pact to unite against the Parliament, and the feeling of the sheer people of England was veering against the austere rule of the Puritan and coming again to the old known and tried idea of Kingship. 'Why not,' they asked, 'a good peace with His Majesty?'

Cromwell and a few others knew why not; because the King was utterly impossible to deal with; because he did not admit that he, the King, *could* be dealt with, made party to a bargain or an agreement, like an ordinary man.

But in the minds of the common people, Charles did not get the blame nor they the credit of this attitude of his. Cromwell in particular had lost much of his prestige; the zealots blamed him for his conferences with the King, the moderates because they had not succeeded. He brought about meetings between the leaders of the two factions, Presbyterians and Independents, but quite uselessly—neither would yield a jot. Then the extreme men of the Parliament and the extreme men of the army were gotten together by his care to discuss the desperate state of affairs.

This conference resolved itself into a bitter and academic dispute on the various forms of government, each man backing himself by manifold quotations from Scripture.

'Wherefore,' cried Cromwell, starting up impatiently, 'do you argue which is best—monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy—when you are come here to find a remedy for the present evils?'

Thereat they began to reply together, tediously and idly, and Cromwell picked up the cushion from the chair on which he sat and hurled it at Ludlow's head, and before it could be flung back to him he ran down the stairs, thus ending the conference.

Soon after, the army came together at Windsor and, with prayers and tears and exhortations, besought God to tell them for what mistreading or fault all these turmoils and distresses had come upon them.

And the conclusion of these three days of mystic exaltation was that God was punishing them for their dealings with Charles Stewart, who was henceforth to be no more considered or dealt with, but treated as a delinquent and man of blood who would be, in good time, made to answer for his sins to men before he went to answer for them to God.

The situation was a paradox. The Scots were invading the kingdom to restore Charles and to force the Covenant on England ; these two matters were no less the object of the parliamentary majority, yet they were bound to withstand Hamilton, for his victory would mean their own utter overthrow.

To further complicate the situation, Langdale and the English Cavaliers, joined with Hamilton, abhorred the Covenant, and were fighting not merely for the re-establishment of the monarchy but the re-establishment of the Church of England.

It was obvious, even to the most hopeful, that only the sword could cut these tangles ; it was obvious, even to the most hesitating, that the Scots must be driven back over their own Border.

Cromwell, who had been on the edge of impeachment, who had many eager foes now in Parliament and army, was called forth again at the supreme moment.

He was sent to South Wales, crushed the rebellion there, took Pembroke Castle, heard Hamilton had crossed the Border, turned northwards and, by July, was in Leicestershire. By the middle of August he had joined General Lambert between Leeds and York.

There his scouts brought him news that Hamilton and Langdale had effected a juncture and were marching for London.

' If,' said Cromwell, ' they reach London, then good night to us, for the King will be master for all in all, and all the blood and bitterness will have been for naught.'

There was nothing but him and his force to stay them. He had, perhaps, eight thousand men ; they, twenty-one thousand, or near it. The weather was tumultuous, stormy ; torrents of rain fell, the upland fells were almost impassable from mud and bog. Cromwell had brought

his army by long and arduous marches from Wales; many of them were barefoot, many in rags. None of them had yet received the months of arrears of pay which had been so long in dispute. Plunder was forbidden them; they were there, like the hosts of Joshua, to fight for the Lord, and for nothing else.

My Lord Duke, with his great straggling army, came over the open heaths as far as Preston and Wigan, no colours displayed because of the wind, no tents nor fires at night because of the wind and the rain; so they marched, a weary troop, neither well-disciplined nor well-generated, and soon to face those troops which Oliver Cromwell had made the best in the world. But there was with them neither hesitation nor dismay, for half of them were Scots, and Langdale's men were of the same breed as Cromwell's, and would fight as well and endure as stubbornly.

Cromwell came to Clitheroe and lay in the house of a Mr. Sherburn, a Papist, at Stonyhurst. The next day was Wednesday, and still raining; the weather, the soldiers said, 'was as fearful a marvel as the hideous sight of English fighting English on English earth'; the sky was one colour with earth, heavy, dun; the beaten heath, the broken bushes dripped with moisture, the water ran in rivulets through the soaked earth. As the rain ceased for a while the wind would rise, sweeping strongly across the open spaces.

Ashton marched to Whalley, other troops of dragoons to Clitheroe, Cromwell advanced towards Preston. On the other side my Lord Duke advanced, also, hardly knowing where, in the rain and wind, on the undulating ground of hillocks and hollows, his army lay, or how and where it was available.

Sir Marmaduke Langdale was near Langdridge Chapel, on Preston Moor, the other side the Ribble. Four miles away my Lord the Duke, who was at Darwen, the south side of the river too, where there should have been a ford, but was not, so swollen was the tide with the mighty rains. My Lord Duke passed the bridge with most of his brigades and sent Lord Middleton with a large portion of the cavalry to Wigan.

Meanwhile, through the rain and the confusion, stum-

bling over the incredibly rough ground, a forlorn of horse and foot, commanded by Major Hodgson and Major Rounal, came upon Sir Marmaduke and his three thousand English.

The Scots, themselves confused, thinking it only an attack of Lancaster Presbyterians, did not support Langdale, who complained that he had not even enough powder ; but he fought, he and his men, like heroes, against forces more than double their number—against the Ironsides, for four hours, always in the wind and wet, on the rough ground. Then such as was left of them gave way and fell back on Preston ; some of the infantry surrendered, some of the horse escaped north to join Munro.

Meanwhile, Cromwell had swept Hamilton and Baillie back across the Darwen, back across the Ribble, had captured both bridges and driven my lord towards Preston town. Three times in his retreat my lord turned round to face his enemies, crying out for ' King Charles ! ' Three times he repulsed the troops pursuing him, and the third time he drove them far back and, escaping from them, swam the river and joined Lieutenant-General Baillie where he had enclosed himself on the top of a hill.

Night fell and the battle was stayed ; all were wet, weary, hungry, haggled ; the Parliamentarians, the victors, not the less exhausted, but with fire in their hearts and hymns of praise on their lips. Cromwell wrote to ' the Committee of Lancashire sitting at Manchester ' his account of the day's fight, dispatched it, prayed, and got into the saddle again.

It was still foul weather, wind, rain, miles of muddy heath, hillocks, hollows now stained with blood and scattered with bodies, men, and horses, dead and dying.

The Duke of Hamilton's forces fought all that day and the next, routed again and again, rallied again and again ; always the rain, the wind, the muddy heath, the low clouds, always the soldiers growing fainter and wearier. Beaten from the bridge of Ribble, falling back, a drumless march on Wigan Moor, leaving the ammunition to the enemy, falling farther back on to Wigan town, where they thought to make some stand, but decided not to, with skirmishes of detachments at Redbank where the Scots

nearly worsted Colonel Pride at Ribble Bridge, and where Middleton (the weather, always foul, bringing confusion and fatigue) missed his chief, coming too late. And so it went for three days on the wet Yorkshire heaths, till finally it was over ; the fate of King, Church, Constitution, and Covenant was decided. Hamilton and the vanguard of horse rode wearily and aimlessly towards Uttoxeter ; Munro and the rearguard straggled back to their own country ; a thousand of them were left dead under the rain, trodden into the bloody heath ; three thousand of them were made prisoners. And the second Civil War which had flamed up so suddenly and so fiercely was ended.

The Puritans—the patriots—had passed through their darkest hour triumphantly ; their ragged, hungry, unpaid soldiers, fighting truly for God and not for pay, had again saved England from the return of the tyrant and his manifold oppressions and confusions.

After the three days' fight was over, Cromwell sat down at Warrington to write to the Speaker of the House of Commons a long account of the rout.

'The Duke,' he wrote, 'is marching with his remaining horse towards Namptwich. . . . If I had a thousand horse that could but trot thirty miles, I should not doubt but to give a very good account of them ; but truly we are so harassed and haggled out in this business, that we are not able to do more than walk at an easy pace after them.'

But whether or no the Puritans were too wearied to pursue their enemies mattered little ; the day was decided.

The Duke of Hamilton, wandering vaguely, with fewer and fewer men after him, was finally taken at Uttoxeter, where he surrendered, a sick and broken man.

Cromwell cleared the Border of the remnants of the Scots, retook Berwick and Carlisle, engaged the Argyll faction, now the head of the Government of Scotland, to exclude all royalists from power, and turned back towards England, the foremost man of the moment again, and in the eyes of at least half England, the saviour of the country from the invader.

But if the country was grateful, the Parliament was not. Denzil Holles, fiercest of Presbyterians, rose up at Westminster to lead a party against his enemy Cromwell. The

Lords, who had all become royalists, considered whether they should impeach the victorious general ; it was noticeable how much bolder they all were when the Independents and their indomitable leader were absent, and how, as the return of the army, strengthened in renown and prestige, drew nearer, they began to cast round for some means of escape from the fact facing them, that when Cromwell reappeared at Westminster he would be absolute master of the political situation, for he had behind him the entire army and they had nothing but the mere unsupported weight of the law.

So sharp was the division and so fierce had party hatred become, that the Presbyterians at Westminster hated the Independents with the army as no Roundhead or Cavalier had ever hated in the first broad division of the war.

Toleration was the watchword of Cromwell and his followers, and no word was more detestable to the Parliament. To mark their loathing of it they passed an ordinance punishing Atheism, Arianism, Socinianism, Quakerism, Arminianism, and Baptists with death.

Meanwhile, Cromwell, looming ever larger in the imaginations of men, was returning triumphant to London. If his fame had been at the lowest when he left for Wales, it was at the highest now. Denzil Holles conceived the idea of meeting material force by moral force ; as they had nothing else to oppose to Cromwell they must oppose the King. Charles still remained, in many ways, the hub of the political wheel.

The Parliament must now yield either to him or to the army ; they thought they saw their chance with Charles. If terms could be come to with him, and he be installed in London before the army returned, Cromwell would be faced with a situation with which he would probably not be able to cope. *He* had denounced the King solemnly at the Windsor meeting, therefore Charles, once again in power, could not treat him otherwise than as any enemy.

The vote against further addresses to the King, which Cromwell's eloquence had hurried through the House, was repealed, and parliamentary commissions were sent to the Isle of Wight to open a new treaty with the King.

But they were not prepared to make concessions ; the propositions of Uxbridge, of Newcastle, of Oxford, of Hampton Court were offered again and again, fought inch by inch. Charles, too, was still as intractable as ever ; the coalition between royalist and Presbyterian seemed doomed to failure ; the negotiations were continually ruptured on the subject of Church government. Charles would not forgo his bishops, and the Parliament would not endure them ; though each side was desperate, on this point they were firm.

Meanwhile, Cromwell and his Ironsides were coming nearer.

CHAPTER VII

THE CONSTANCY OF THE KING

THE fifteen commissioners had left the King ; Sir Harry Vane, perhaps the sincerest republican of all, had stayed behind a moment to entreat Charles—as Pym—as Cromwell—had entreated him—‘ to be sincere.’

The King, grave, composed, courtly, had answered him as he had answered Pym and Cromwell—‘ In all these dealings I have been sincere.’

And so they left him, and the wearisome yet desperate negotiations, which had been protracted from the middle of the September after Preston Rout to nearly the end of November, were over.

Charles had given way ; he had consented to the temporary abolition of the bishops, for three years at least ; the coalition of Royalist and Presbyterian was formed against Cromwell and the army ; the treaty which made a third Civil War imminent was signed.

After the Commissioners had departed, Lord Digby came to Charles, who still sat at the head of the table at which he had so often held his own in caustic argument and learned dispute on the subject of Episcopacy.

‘ Bring me,’ said the King, ‘ a little wine.’

Lord Digby, without calling a servant, served the King himself.

The winter twilight was falling ; the sea fog drifting

over the island thickened the sad atmosphere that filled the room in which the King sat. A private house at Newport had been for some weeks now his residence, and carried with it less state, but more semblance of freedom, than Carisbrooke Castle.

The King wore grey. Since his own servants had been taken from him he had grown more and more neglectful of his attire; there was nothing either fine or splendid in his garments, and he wore no jewels. His face showed a more cheerful expression than had been of late usual to him, and when he had drunk the alicant, a faint colour came into his cheeks and a sparkle to his eyes.

‘Digby,’ he said, ‘I think I shall yet be able to undo these rogues, these traitors, these villains—but come, I must write to my Lord Ormonde, for I have had to publicly give orders that he is to do nothing in Ireland, and he may be misled.’

To most these words, the first he had spoken since he had assured Sir Harry Vane of his sincerity, would have appeared indeed startling and ironical, but Lord Digby knew the whole of his master’s tortuous intrigues. He was aware that from the moment the negotiations with the Parliament began, Charles had been planning to escape from the Isle of Wight, and join that portion of the navy which was now under the command of Rupert and the Prince of Wales, and thus make a descent on Ireland, where the incredible exertions of the Marquess of Ormonde kept alive a royalist party, and from there attempt another such invasion of England as had just ended so fatally at Preston Rout.

Such was the wild, vague, and desperate scheme which the King nursed in preference to returning triumphantly to London as the ally of the Parliament, and from there dealing with the army, now his open enemies.

But this, though it might seem the surest proof of his levity and falsity, was in reality the uttermost testimony he could give of his constancy to principles which he accounted Divine.

The price the Parliament asked was the sacrifice of Episcopacy, and that was what Charles would never consent to. Far preferable was the wild hazard, the

desperate risk, the almost certain danger of trusting to Rupert and his lawless little fleet, or Ormonde and his inadequate forces, or Ireland and her uncertain loyalty, than keeping the pact with the Presbyterian, who refused the Divine form of Church government.

Now, almost before the commissioners had entered their coaches, he was hurriedly writing to Ormonde and to the Queen.

‘Do not be astonished at any concession I may make,’ he wrote to the Marquess, ‘for it will come to nothing, and heed no public commands I may give, until you hear that I am free; but keep alive with all vigour the spirit of loyalty in Ireland.’

To his wife he wrote—‘The great concessions I have made to-day were merely in order to my escape.’

When these hasty letters, in the writing of which the King seemed to relieve some of the feelings that he had had to contain in his bosom during the long hours of his conference with the representatives of Parliament, were finished and locked into the secret drawers of the King’s desk, Lord Digby lit the candles and closed the shutters over the mournful, wet, misty night.

‘I would, sir,’ he said, with a little shudder, ‘that we were well out of this cursed island.’

Charles rose from the little desk; his eyes were brilliant, his mouth hardly set under the delicate moustaches.

‘If I were once in Ireland,’ he said, ‘fortune would look differently on me.’

He had always been so—always, under the most cruel mortification hopeful, trustful in some expedient. Ever since his overthrow he had trusted first in Rupert and Montrose, then in the foreign armies the Queen would raise, then in Hamilton, then in the divisions of his enemies, and now in Rupert and his elusive ships.

Lord Digby could not fail to see this incurable hopefulness of his master, nor to argue ill from it; but he was himself light-spirited and fantastical, and his remonstrances were few and faint.

Yet he hazarded one now.

‘As the army is deadly disloyal and much raised up of late, and as the Parliament is your one sure refuge from it,

sir, would it not be wiser to observe this treaty, at least for a while ? ’

‘ Never ! ’ cried Charles fiercely, ‘ Never will I yield ! I have sworn that I will defend the Church of England and my rights—even unto death. I will not deal with these rebels save by the sword. The sword ? Nay, the halter. I hope, Digby, that God will give me the day when I can see these rogues marched to Tyburn. Thou canst scarcely conceive,’ he added, with great intensity, ‘ what a hatred I have for them—how my mortifications, my humiliations, my losses, all the loyal blood shed for me cry out for repayment ! How I loathe them and their heretical opinions and their canting speech—how I detest them for mine own helplessness ! ’

He flung himself into the arm-chair beside the hearth, where a feeble fire burnt neglected.

‘ Hamilton’s a prisoner,’ he said gloomily. ‘ What will they do with my faithful lord ? How many noble lives have I not to avenge ? ’

As he spoke he thought (as he thought often now, too often for his own peace) of Strafford, his first great, awful, and useless sacrifice.

‘ If it cost my heart’s blood I will not submit,’ he muttered, biting his lip.

But Lord Digby would not so easily relinquish his point—that the Parliament was a surer refuge from the army than Rupert or Ormonde, or any possible ships or possible men either of these Cavaliers might be able to command.

‘ Fairfax,’ he reminded the King, ‘ sent Ireton to the House with a remonstrance from the army, protesting against the Parliament dealing with Your Majesty, and even daring to say that you should be brought to trial.’

‘ But the House,’ replied the King, with a grim smile, ‘ refused to consider these demands of “ armed sectaries.” ’

‘ But the army,’ persisted Lord Digby, ‘ hath the power.’

‘ I will be free of all of them,’ cried Charles passionately. ‘ Of the army, of the Parliament, of all their cursed acts and heresies.’

He lapsed into a melancholy silence again. My lord

put another log on the fire and stirred the faint flames to a blaze.

'In the Queen's letter of this morning,' said Charles suddenly, 'she mentioned that loyal gentlewoman, Margaret Lucas—she hath fallen ill. When she had the news of the end of her brother, Sir Charles, she was as one who had received a death-sentence.'

Tears moistened his own eyes. He was not usually very sensible of the sorrows of those who were ruined in his service, and gratitude was no part of his character or tradition; yet there was something in the story of the gallant young Lucas, who, after an heroic defence of Colchester, had surrendered on terms which bargained for quarter for the inferiors, but left the superiors at the mercy of the enemy, yet who had been taken out with his fellow-officer, Sir George Lisle, and shot like a dog before those walls he had so valiantly defended through three months of famine and misery, which moved the King, even to tears.

'Ireton's doing,' he cried. 'Jesus God! grant that I may send Ireton to Tyburn one day.'

'From an officer who came here recently I heard an account of it,' said Lord Digby, in a low voice, 'They neither of them thought to have died, seeing they had surrendered to mercy, but they made no grief of it. Sir Charles was shot first, and Sir George bent and kissed him while he was yet warm (and conscious, I hope) and spoke to the wretched rebels, "Come nearer and make sure of me." And upon one of the dogs replying, "I warrant you we shall hit you, Sir George," he smiled and said, "Ay! but I have been nearer to you, many a time, my friends, and you have missed me,—I would I had been there to give them company."''

'And they are gone!' sighed Charles. 'How many of the young and brave have I not lost! Ah, Digby, mine hath been a dismal fate, to ruin all those I would most advance, to bring down those whom I would most exalt.'

He was not thinking now of Sir Charles Lucas, but of the Queen; his thoughts were never long from her. The image of her in her exile, in her poverty and humiliation, in her beaten pride and broken splendour was the most lively of all his mortifications, the most exquisite of all his

secret tortures ; he felt that he had abjectly failed towards her, towards her children, and, keenest sting of all, that she must despise him for his failure and his misfortune.

His head sank lower and lower on his breast, and two tears forced themselves from his tired eyes and hung burning on his faded cheeks.

‘Digby, my faithful lord,’ he said, ‘I do sometimes think that it would have been better for me to have died at Naseby. By now the Lord would have judged me, and I should have been at peace—peace, peace! How the word dangles before us while the thing is never to be found, this side of heaven.’

Digby dropped on one knee beside him.

‘May Your Majesty soon find it,’ he said, in a broken voice, ‘and live long to enjoy it.’

‘If it were possible!’ murmured Charles. ‘But we must get to Ireland—it is very needful that we should get to Ireland.’

Lord Digby lowered his voice, as if somewhere in this lonely, desolate-looking room a spy of Parliament or army might lurk.

‘The preparations are all complete,’ he said. ‘It only needs to wait until the Commissioners have left the island.’

A little shudder shook the King.

‘What will it feel, Digby,’ he murmured, ‘to be free again—free!’

Then, as if rousing himself from thoughts that threatened to be overwhelming, he put out his hand and took up a small brown volume tooled in gold, and, turning over the thin pages rough with print, let slip his mind from the leases of care and suffered himself to be distracted by Lucan’s *Pharsalia*.

The mist changed to rain, which slashed at the window ; a winter wind disturbed the tapestry and flickered the flames on the deep hearth, which hissed beneath the drops falling down the wide chimney.

Charles, sunk in the deep, worn leather chair, with one thin hand supporting his thin face, the long curls flowing over his breast, gathered consolation from those ancient deeds of melancholy heroism and fated endeavour.

Lord Digby left the room to concert with the few per-

sonal attendants left the King about the final arrangements for the King's flight from Newport as soon as the Parliamentarians should have returned to London.

But again Charles Stewart proved unfortunate.

The day before his projected escape Colonel Hammond, the Governor of the Island, sent an escort to remove His Majesty from Newport to Hurst Castle, a dreary residence near the coast, on the sea shingle, where Charles was closely guarded beyond all hope of escape, even if his word of honour not to escape had not been extracted from him: and this was a point where he would admit of no sophistries. So the dream of Rupert and his ships and Ormonde and his loyal Catholics vanished, as all Charles' dreams had vanished, into the bitter obscurity of disappointment.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE BALANCE

IT was the army who had ordered the King's removal to a place of greater security, the army who had now resolved to make an end of these long negotiations between King and Parliament.

On the day after Charles was closed into Hurst Castle the army marched into London, Cromwell not yet with them; but other men, imbued with his spirit, were his representatives. He had proposed that the Parliament should be forcibly dissolved and a new one elected, and a Declaration to this effect had been issued by the army now openly at variance with the assembly, which had flung aside their great Remonstrance. Leading officers spoke darkly, yet unmistakably, of what they would do to the King, ay, and to the Parliament.

The Commons, undaunted, voted that the King's concessions were sufficient ground for treating of a general peace; the reply of the army was to send Colonel Pride down to the House to arrest every member who had voted to continuing negotiations with the King.

'It was the only way,' said Henry Ireton, 'to save the kingdom from a new war into which King and Parliament

conjointly would plunge us—that is our warrant and our law for what we do.’

Cromwell, coming the evening of that day to London, approved. ‘Since it is done, I am glad of it,’ he said, ‘and will endeavour to maintain it.’

Meanwhile, Harrison had gone down to Hurst Castle and removed the King from that melancholy solitude to Windsor.

The now purged House of Commons, which consisted of a mere handful of Independent members, was nothing but the mouthpiece of the army, who were now the masters of the hour. In council they decided against bringing the King to trial if he could be brought by any means to reason, and Lord Denbigh was sent to Windsor again—once more and for the last time—to offer Charles terms.

The same terms—the abandonment of Episcopacy and of his own absolute sovereignty.

All illusion was at last stripped from the proceedings ; no meaningless courtesies or formalities obscured the issue. The army were treating Charles as they would treat a vanquished enemy, and he at last saw it—saw there was no hope, no evasion possible, no succour at hand, no shift, no expedient to which he could turn ; saw, too, for the first time, the sharp and bitter nature of the alternative of his refusal of these terms.

The army talked freely of his trial and death ; there was barely a disguise given to the fact that Lord Denbigh gave him his choice between the Church of England, his Crown—and his life.

This struck not at the King’s ambition or lust of power or love of authority, but at his conscience, for he believed as firmly that he was there to uphold the Divine ordinance in Church and State as Cromwell believed that God was mocked by Laud’s surplices, candles, and genuflexions.

On the gloomy day in the end of December when the return of Lord Denbigh with the King’s answer was expected, Henry Ireton was with his father-in-law in his house in Drury Lane. Both men showed signs of the tremendous physical and spiritual stress they had lately undergone. Cromwell especially was haggard ; the burden which he had assumed was no light one, nor was the

responsibility he was about to undertake one which could be worn easily.

Up to the very last he had hoped that the King would give way. Lord Denbigh's journey had been on his recommendation, and he still clung to the possibility that Charles, now absolutely with his back against the wall, might make those concessions which would enable the army to spare him.

But the other and more likely alternative had to be faced.

'Can we,' said Henry Ireton, in a tone almost of awe, 'bring to trial the crowned and anointed King?'

The thing was indeed unheard of, appalling in its audacity even to the men who had been already years in arms against their King—a thing without precedent, full of a nameless horror. But Oliver Cromwell was not troubled by this consideration. He was uplifted by his stern enthusiasm from all fears of laws and tradition; he knew himself capable of moulding the movement to suit the need; and he was of an incalculable courage.

Yet in this affair he had shown himself more moderate, almost more hesitating, than many of his colleagues; he did not see clearly; he was not sure what God had meant him to do, and his personal feeling, despite his absolute refusal to deal further with Charles after his treachery had been made manifest, was still towards some arrangement by which the King could be returned to the throne and forced to keep his people's laws.

His trust in the King had been utterly scattered; his sentiments had become almost republican; yet in his heart he struggled to find some means of saving the King as he had struggled since the end of the first Civil War.

He still hesitated before committing himself to the fierce measures advocated by the great body of the army; yet Charles had done some things which Cromwell could never forgive.

Notably the calling in of the Scots.

To the Englishman, English of the English in every fibre, this 'attempt to vassalage us to a foreign nation,' as he had called it, was the intolerable, unforgivable wrong—a thing which burnt the blood to think of—a wrong which the

Scots, beaten back across the Border and Hamilton waiting death in London, did not soften or make amends for. Cromwell had broken the Scots, but he could not forgive them.

'Had he not done that,' he cried aloud, 'it had been easier to forget his manifold deceits.'

'God hath witnessed against him,' replied Ireton.

But he, too, was for moderation; he had suggested a trial of the King and then a decorous imprisonment.

Such a compromise did not please the Lieutenant-General, who was waiting for the indication for swift, prompt action. He wanted an impetus to an irrecoverable decision, not an expedient for avoiding it; nothing in the nature of a shift was ever tolerable to him.

'Until Lord Denbigh return,' he broke out, 'we can decide on nothing. I know not what the Providence of God may put upon us; but this I know, the King hath one more chance, and if he take it not—there will be no excuse but folly and cowardice to delay our dealings with him.'

'And when we have dealt with him—what then?' asked Ireton, and he looked gloomy and apprehensive, like a man oppressed with many heavy thoughts.

Oliver Cromwell rose from the table at which both had been sitting; through his air of weariness the indomitable fire of his inner conviction, his inner faith glowed. Ireton, looking at him, thought that he always, even in his moments of deepest dejection or melancholy, gave that impression of one carrying a flame.

'I have much rested on these words of late,' he said: "'They that shine with thee shall perish. They that war against thee shall be as nothing; and as a thing of nought. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.'"

As he spoke he moved to the window and stood with his back against the dark curtains which hung before it. His clothes were dark too, his white band and his tanned but pale face, his brown hair and clasped hands were all picked out and shone upon by the candlelight; for the rest, his figure was in shadow. Ireton, gazing at him, was impressed by something about him which, hearty and

homely as were his manners, seemed to always put him beyond his brother officers: the quality of greatness, Henry Ireton thought it was; but he wondered wherein lay greatness.

Cromwell did not speak again, and Ireton took his leave.

'I am going to Sir Thomas Fairfax,' he said, 'and if any messenger comes from Windsor to-night, I will send one over to you with the news.'

After he had been alone a little while Cromwell went upstairs, still with a thoughtful face, with eyes downcast and a frowning brow.

The room he entered was rendered cheerful by the bright firelight and the glow of the candles in the wall sconces of polished brass, and it formed the setting to a fair and tender picture.

Cromwell's wife was seated at the spinet which occupied one corner of the room, and either side of her stood one of her younger daughters, singing. The lady and the children were all dressed in a brown colour, and the purity of their fair-complexioned faces and the delicacy of their soft and waving gold-brown hair was heightened by their collars and caps of white cambric enriched with exquisite needlework.

At the Lieutenant-General's entrance they paused, and Elisabeth Cromwell was about to rise, but he bade them continue and crossed to the fireplace, where he stood quietly, with his head hanging on his breast.

With a blush for the presence of their father at their simple performance, the two little girls began again; the fresh voices, sharply pure and sweetly tremulous, rose clearly and echoed clearly in the high-ceiled chamber, accompanied by the faint, half-muffled notes of the spinet.

'Ye Holy Angels bright,
Who wait at God's right hand,
Or through the realms of light
Fly at your Lord's command.
Assist our song,
Or else the theme
Too high doth seem
For mortal tongue.'

The little singers had forgotten the embarrassment of

an audience ; their eyes sparkled, their little round mouths strained open in a rapture.

Elisabeth Cromwell, as her fingers touched the keys to the simple melody, looked across the spinet to her husband.

‘Ye blessed souls at rest,
Who ran this earthly race,
And now from sin released,
Behold the Saviour’s face.
His praises sound
As in His light
With sweet delight
Ye do abound.’

The mother’s head bent a little ; she dropped her eyes. She was thinking of Robert and Oliver, and wondering if they were leaning from heaven to listen to this song—
‘blessed souls at rest.’ Ah, well !

‘Ye saints, who toil below,
Adore your Heavenly King,
And onward as ye go
Some joyful anthem sing.
Take what He gives
And praise Him still
Through good and ill,
Who ever lives !’

The young voices gathered greater fervency on the next lines—

‘My soul, bear thou thy part,
Triumph in God above,
And with a well-tuned heart
Sing thou the songs of love !
Let all thy days
Till life shall end,
Whate’er He send,
Be filled with praise !’

Frances and Mary Cromwell, having ended their hymn, came round from behind the spinet and curtsied to their father.

‘A sweet song,’ he said, ‘and sweetly sung. Who wrote the words, Mary ?’

‘Mr. Richard Baxter, sir,’ she replied ; ‘he taught

them to the troop he was chaplain of at Kidderminster—and Henry copied them and brought them home to us.’

‘Learn Mr. Baxter’s hymns,’ he smiled, ‘but not his tenets. He is lukewarm and unstable.’

Mrs. Cromwell rose.

‘And now they must to bed—I fear it is already over-late.’

The Lieutenant-General stooped and kissed each of them on the fair, untroubled brow.

‘A good night, my dears, my sweets. A good night, my little wenches.’

He lingered over the farewell caress half wistfully, and as they left the room his tired eyes followed them.

Elisabeth Cromwell came to her husband’s side and glanced up at him, then down at the fire.

‘You are troubled to-night,’ she said, in a low voice.

‘No,’ he answered ‘no.’

‘About Richard’s marriage settlements,’ she returned.

‘It is over a year since that affair was first opened.’

‘I know,’ he replied, ‘I know. But what can I do? I cannot settle on Dorothy Mayor moneys which I have not got for my own. There is Henry to think of, and the two little ones—and thou knowest, Bess, I am not rich.’

She knew well enough from many economies of her own. He had strained his estates at the commencement of the first war, when he had raised and equipped, at his own expense, his troop in Cambridgeshire; his pay was in arrears and had lately been reduced; he had waited many ancient debts due to him from the Government; and he had returned the larger portion of the income arising from the grant of Lord Worchester’s lands to the Parliament to be used in settling that unhappy country, Ireland. Therefore he was now more hampered and with less money to dispose of than when in private life, and all his frugal living and all his wife’s good management would not permit him to afford Mr. Mayor what he demanded for his daughter; therefore Richard’s match had hung a year, and seemed likely to hang longer.

‘I would rather,’ said Richard’s father abruptly, ‘that the lad was more like his brother Henry, and less eager to take a wife and live easily.’

'All cannot be as thee,' answered Elisabeth Cromwell half sadly, 'wrapped in great affairs.'

He turned.

'Why, Bess,' he said, taking her hand, 'that did sound as a reproach.'

'Nay, my lord, my dear,' she replied, in a subdued passion; 'but thou art so much away.'

'But thou art not alone,' he said, eagerly bending over her.

'A woman is always alone, Oliver, when she is away from him she loves. I think a man doth not understand that—he hath so much else—thou—thou hast so much—and I am gone right into the background of thy life!'

He took both her hands now and laid them on his heart.

'Thou art dearer to me than any creature in the world,' he said. 'Let that content thee.'

She sighed and smiled together. By her great love for him she could measure her great pain because of him—the separations, the anxieties, the apprehension, the knowledge that she was only a part of his life, that he had now many, many other things to think of more important than her, while she had nothing but him—always him. But he could not understand.

'Well, well,' she said.

'Why art thou sad, Bess?' he asked tenderly. 'Is it about Dick's marriage?'

She shook her head; her gentle face flushed with the thought that came to her.

'Oh, Oliver, I have been sorry about the King,' she said simply.

'The King!' He dropped her hands.

Elisabeth Cromwell lifted her large, clear grey eyes.

'What is to be the fate of the King?' she asked, trembling.

'That hangs in the balance,' he replied briefly. 'Bring not these questions on to my own hearth, Bess.'

Thus rebuked, she moved away, trembling more.

Her husband looked at her kindly.

'It is not for me or thee,' he said gently, 'to discuss the fate of the King, but for God in His good time to disclose it. Maybe He will harden His heart as He hardened

the heart of Pharaoh, and maybe He will turn it to peace.'

'These are terrible times,' replied Elisabeth Cromwell rapidly. 'I cannot but think of how terrible—being a woman I cannot but tremble—fearful things are said now about the King—about—bringing him to trial.'

'Why not?' asked her husband sternly. 'Hath he not been the author of two civil wars, and would he not have brought about a third save that God struck his forces at Preston Battle?'

'But he—he is the Governor of England,' she answered timidly.

'Nay, no longer,' returned Oliver Cromwell; 'that high office hath he defiled. God hath overturned him—"He shall put down the mighty from their seats and exalt the humble and meek." The King hath sinned against God, against his people, against the laws of England.'

'Alack—it is beyond my understanding,' sighed his wife; 'but it seems to me *he is the King!*'

'Be not deceived by high-sounding words,' replied the Lieutenant-General. 'Charles Stewart is a man and must pay as men pay—for their sins and their follies.'

As he spoke the servant entered with a note, which had just been brought, he said, by General Fairfax's man.

Cromwell gazed at the seal—Henry Ireton's arms pressed into wax scarcely cold—a full minute before he opened it, and the blood rushed to his face.

When he opened the letter his fingers shook.

It contained a few words from his son-in-law, the sand yet sticking to the ink.

The King had utterly refused to see Lord Denbigh, and utterly refused to have any dealings either with Parliament or army.

He defied them. Now, driven to the last extremity, he had flung aside all subterfuge and all evasion; he stood by his conscience, and no matter what the consequences, he refused terms which he regarded as a betrayal of God's laws in Church or State.

Oliver Cromwell crumpled up the letter with a gesture of, for him, unusual agitation.

'So it is over!' he muttered. He gazed at his wife

with eyes that did not see her ; drops of sweat stood out on his forehead and his lips quivered.

‘ What is over ? ’ asked Elisabeth Cromwell, in terrified tones.

He drew himself together with an effort.

‘ The reign of Charles Stewart,’ he replied simply.

CHAPTER IX

BY WHAT AUTHORITY ?

THE Lords having rejected the ordinance for bringing the King to trial, the Commons, always under the influence of the army, declared themselves capable of enforcing their own act by their own law, ‘ the People being, under God, the original of all just power.’

Charles was hurried from Windsor to St. James’s, and the day after his arrival in London put on his trial for having endeavoured to subvert his people’s rights, for having levied war on them with the help of foreign troops, and with having, after once being spared, endeavoured by all wicked arts to again involve the kingdom in bloody confusion.

This was the end after so many years of strife, evasion, pacts made and broken, bloodshed and lives ruined. Charles was a prisoner on trial for his life, and in one of his splendid beds at Whitehall (now the headquarters of the army) Oliver Cromwell slept or lay awake and struggled with tumultuous thoughts.

Many who had been with him all along were against him now. Vane and Sidney protested hotly. Many members refused to sit among the judges who were to try Charles.

‘ The King,’ said Sidney, ‘ can be tried by no court, and by such a court as this no man can be tried.’

‘ I tell you,’ said Cromwell sombrely, ‘ we will cut off his head with the crown upon it.’

So passionate and vigorous and unalterable was his resolution now it was taken.

The fiercer spirits of the army were with him. “ Blood

defileth the land,"' quoted Ludlow, "' and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it."'

Cromwell, too, now believed that by God's express law the King was doomed.

It mattered not a whit to him that the tribunal which was to try Charles had neither legal nor moral right, since there was no law by which the King could be brought to trial, and the judges represented neither the Commons nor the people, but a section of the army; indeed, while others endeavoured to find excuses with which to cover up the obvious illegality of the proceeding, Cromwell disdained any such shifts. As he had been the man who had striven longest and most arduously to make some compromise with the King, he was now the man who was advancing most boldly and directly to the climax of the King's last phase.

He had decided there could be no peace while Charles lived, and he spared no effort to secure his death.

The time for temporizing was past, he believed, and he acted, as he never failed to act at a crisis, with swiftness, with firmness, with unhesitating decision.

Whitelocke, St. John, Wilde, and Rolle declined to be President of the Court which tried the King, but John Bradshaw accepted.

For a week the trial in the great hall of Westminster (which the King had last entered when he came to demand the five members) continued, a long haughty protest on the part of Charles, a stern overruling of him on the part of the Court—the whole thing almost incredible in swiftness, fierceness, and enthusiastic passion overlaid with the stately forms of ancient ceremonial. On the fourth time of the sitting, the 29th January, being Saturday, the Court was held—as many believed—for the last time.

Lord Digby, who had been separated from his master when Charles was removed to Hurst Castle, and had been wandering about, more or less in disguise ever since, had managed to gain London, and on this morning of the 29th, a cold, wet, and grey day, he made his way to Westminster Hall, to witness the awful, unbelievable spectacle of the trial of his King.

The great gates of the Hall were opened to admit the general public, which soon swarmed in, and Digby found himself in the midst of a vast concourse of people, mostly of the baser sort, who pushed and gossiped and passed food and drink from one to another, so that the atmosphere was like the pit of a theatre for the smell of beer and oranges, as it had been at the trial of Lord Strafford.

Lord Digby caught scraps of conversation which pierced him to the heart—how, on the second day, the head had fallen off the King's cane and he had had to stoop for it himself—how he had paled at this, as if he took it for an ill-omen . . . how curt Bradshaw had been with him, and how certain all were that there could only be one end—the axe. . . .

Soon the Court entered, and a great 'Ah-h,' like an indrawn breath, rose from the crowd when they saw that Serjeant Bradshaw, the Lord President, was attired in a scarlet robe, instead of the black one which he had worn on the previous occasions. 'His cap,' whispered the man next Lord Digby, 'is lined with steel, for fear one might make an attempt on him.'

John Bradshaw, with a very unmoved dignity and stern calmness, took his seat in the midst of the Court, in a crimson velvet chair, having a desk with a crimson velvet cushion before him; either side of him, on the scarlet-hung benches, the fourscore members of the Court seated themselves, all with their hats on; sixteen gentlemen with partisans stood either side the Court; before a table, set at the feet of the President and covered with a rich Turkey carpet on which lay the sword, stood the Serjeant-at-Arms with the mace; the Clerk of the Court sat at this table also.

A company of guards was placed about the Hall to keep order, and everywhere, in the body of the Court and in the galleries, was a great expectant press of people.

After the Court had been sitting about ten minutes, the prisoner arrived in the charge of Colonel Tomlinson and a company of gentlemen with partisans.

As he entered some of the soldiers cried out, 'Execution! Execution! Justice against the traitor at the Bar!'

The Serjeant-at-Arms met the King and conducted him

to the Bar, where a crimson velvet chair was placed for him.

Charles looked sternly at the Court, up at the galleries and the multitude gathered in the body of the Hall ; then he seated himself, without moving his hat.

He was dressed more richly than Lord Digby remembered him to have been for some time ; his suit was black velvet and pale blue silk, with Flemish lace and silver knots ; he carried a long cane in his hand and a pair of doeskin gloves. He was scarcely seated before he rose up again and moved about and looked down at the spectators with a smile of unutterable haughtiness. Lord Digby was near enough to remark that he looked in good health, vigorous, and composed.

Suddenly he glanced up at the Lord President, and though he must have remarked the scarlet robe, he did not change colour.

‘ I shall desire a word—to be heard a little,’ he said, ‘ and hope I shall give no occasion of interruption.’

‘ You may answer in your time,’ replied Bradshaw coldly. ‘ Hear the Court first.’

‘ If it please you, sir, I desire to be heard,’ said the King. ‘ And I shall not give any occasion of interruption—and it is only in a word—a sudden judgment——’

‘ Sir,’ interrupted the Lord President, ‘ you shall be heard in due time, but you are to hear the Court first——’

‘ Sir, I desire—it will be in answer to what I believe the Court will say—sir, a hasty judgment is not so soon recalled——’

‘ Sir,’ replied the Lord President sternly, ‘ you shall be heard before the judgment be given, and in the meantime you may forbear.’

Charles took his seat again, saying, ‘ Well, sir, shall I be heard before judgment be given ? ’

The Lord President now proceeded to address the Court.

‘ Gentlemen, it is well known to most of you that the prisoner at the Bar hath been several times convened before the Court to make answer to a charge of treason——’

Here the King looked up and laughed in the face of the Court.

‘—and other high crimes exhibited against him in the name of the People of England——’

A shrill woman's voice interrupted from one of the galleries—‘Not half the People!’ The King smiled, and there was some disturbance while the lady was silenced or removed.

Bradshaw continued: ‘To which charge being required to answer, he began to take on him to offer reasoning and debate unto the authority of the Court to try and judge him; but being overruled in that, and still required to make his answer, he was still pleased to continue contumacious, and to refuse to submit or answer.’

‘Thereupon the Court have considered of the charge; they have considered of the contumacy and of the notoriety of the fact charged upon the prisoner, and have agreed upon the sentence to be pronounced against this prisoner.’

The Lord President paused a moment, and a low hum went through the Court. The King threw back his head with that expression of incredulous haughtiness still on his face.

‘The prisoner doth desire to be heard,’ continued Bradshaw, ‘before the sentence be pronounced, and the Court hath resolved that they will hear him.’

Charles rose; his scornful eyes flickered along the faces of his judges and rested for a second on the white countenance of Oliver Cromwell, who was looking at him intently.

The Lord President addressed the King—

‘Yet, sir, this much I must tell you beforehand, which you have been minded of before, that if that you have to say be to offer any debate concerning jurisdiction, you are not to be heard in it—you have offered it formerly and you have indeed struck at the root, that is, the power and supreme authority of the Commons of England—but, sir, if you have anything to say in defence of yourself concerning the matter charged, the Court hath given me in command to let you know that they will hear you.’

The King caught hold of the bar in front of him. He began to speak; at first his voice, though steady, was so low that only those near could hear him; he addressed himself to Bradshaw, but he faced all his judges, and his glance travelled from one to another.

At last Lord Digby, straining forward through the press, caught some words.

‘ . . . This many a day all things have been taken away from me, but that which I call more dear to me than my life, my honour, and my conscience—and if I had respect to my life more than the peace of the kingdom, the liberty of the subject, certainly I should have made a particular defence for myself, for by that at leastwise I might have deferred an ugly sentence, which I believe will pass on me.’

He then asked to be heard in the Painted Chamber before the Lords and Commons before any sentence was given.

As he concluded he raised his voice and spoke with great nobleness and force.

‘ And if I cannot get this liberty I do here protest that so fair shows of liberty and peace are pure shows and not otherwise since you will not hear your King.’

A hush followed his speech ; Cromwell whispered to a neighbour ; a faint sunlight penetrated the narrow Gothic window and touched to brilliancy John Bradshaw in his scarlet robes among his crimson cushions.

‘ Sir, you have spoken,’ he said.

‘ Yes, sir,’ replied the King, looking at him austere-ly.

The sunlight strengthened ; the judge blazed in his unrelieved red ; the prisoner was still in shadow ; he stood with his hands on the bar ; Lord Digby could see that he was biting his under-lip.

‘ What you have said,’ announced Bradshaw, ‘ is a further declining of the jurisdiction of this Court, which was the thing wherein you were limited before——’

The King’s voice cut his speech.

‘ Pray excuse me, sir, for my interruption, because you mistake me—it is not a declining of it ; you do judge me before you hear me speak. I say I will not, I do not decline, though I cannot acknowledge the jurisdiction of this Court——’

A deep humming from the Court drowned the rest of his speech.

Bradshaw, stern, slightly flushed, and in a voice of terrible import, made reply—

‘ Sir, this is not altogether new that you have moved

unto us—not altogether new to us, though it is the first time in person that you have offered it to the Court. Sir, you say you do not decline the jurisdiction of the Court.’

‘Not in this that I have said,’ answered Charles swiftly.

‘I understand you well, sir,’ said the Lord President ; ‘but, nevertheless, that which you have offered seems to be contrary to that saying of yours—for the Court are ready to give a sentence.’

The very slightest quiver disturbed the King’s face ; he sought for his handkerchief, found it, and wiped his lips, looking down the while.

‘It is not as you say,’ continued Bradshaw sternly. ‘that we will not hear our King—we have been ready to hear you, we have patiently waited your pleasure for three Courts together, to hear what you would say to the People’s charges against you, to which you have not vouchsafed to give any answer at all.’

As Lord Digby, pressed in the pushing crowd, listened to these words and gazed at the awful scene a sickness came over him ; he saw that terrible red of judge and cushion, chair and bench float in a mist before his eyes, and through that scarlet blur the King’s figure, stripped now of the inviolate sacredness of Majesty—merely a man, a desperate man in a sea of enemies, making a last stand for his life.

Bradshaw concluded his speech by saying that the Court would withdraw to the Court of Awards to consider of the King’s request to be heard in the Painted Chamber, and so they moved out, leaving the red chair and the red benches bare.

Charles was also removed ; as he passed the sword lying on the table covered with the Turkey carpet he said, ‘I do not fear that,’ and Oliver Cromwell and Thomas Harrison, hearing the words, looked at him over their shoulders as they went out.

Lord Digby struggled nearer the front and cried out, ‘God save your Majesty !’ hoping the King would recognize his voice, but it was lost in cries of ‘Justice !’ and ‘Execution !’ which rose from the soldiers.

After half an hour the Court returned and the Serjeant-at-Arms brought back the prisoner. Charles now held in his hand a small bunch of herbs, and truly the atmosphere

was stifling ; he was still composed, but his face was now as white as the wall behind him ; he seated himself and folded his arms.

Bradshaw addressed him ; he was not to be allowed to go before the Lords and Commons in the Painted Chamber. ' The judges are resolved to proceed to punishment and to judgment, and that is their unanimous resolution.'

Some of the spectators groaned ; the sense of impending doom, calamity, and horror spread from one to another. Charles rose ; he was not a whit abashed or lowered in his pride, but there was a passion in his tones, a ringing challenge in his words, which were the indications of an inner despair.

' I know it is vain for me to dispute,' he said. ' I am no sceptic for to deny the power you have—I know that you have power enough ! I confess, sir, I think it would have been for the kingdom's peace if you had shown the lawfulness of your power !' His haughty contempt showed for a moment unmasked, his look, his bearing, his voice, defied them utterly. ' For this delay that I have desired, I confess it is a delay, but a delay very important to the peace of the kingdom, for it is not my person that I look on alone, it is the kingdom's welfare and the kingdom's peace—it is an old sentence that we should think long before we resolve of great matters—therefore, sir, I do say again, that I do put at your doors all the inconveniency of a hasty sentence. I confess I have been here this week, this day eight days ago was the day I came here first, but a little delay of a day or two further may give peace—whereas a hasty judgment may bring on that trouble and perpetual inconveniency to the kingdom that the child which is unborn may repent it.' He paused a second, then raised his voice slightly. ' Therefore again, out of the duty I owe to God, and to my country, I do desire that I may be heard by the Lords and Commons in the Painted Chamber, or any other chamber that you will appoint me.'

The sixty-eight judges made no movement ; Bradshaw, whose dignity and unfaltering composure were as remarkable as the dignity and composure of the prisoner, considering the extraordinary position in which he, a mere Cheshire gentleman, was now placed towards his sovereign,

and what a responsibility he was taking on himself, what undying vengeance, what possibly horrible fate he was facing if the tide should one day turn, briefly replied that the Court had made their resolution and again asked Charles if he had anything to say for himself before sentence was delivered.

The King, facing him, replied—

‘I say this, sir, that if you will hear me, if you will but give this delay, I doubt not but I shall give some satisfaction to you all here. and to my People, after that. And, therefore, I do require you, as you shall answer it at the dreadful Day of Judgment, that you will consider it once again.’

It was what he had said since he had first been put on trial, a steady refusal to recognize this Court (as on all legal grounds he was justified in doing), a refusal to plead or argue the cause, a repetition of the haughty demand—‘By what authority?’ Before the Lords and Commons he might defend himself, not before this tribunal of his rebellious subjects. But as deeply rooted, as unyielding, as his refusal to recognize the Court was the Court’s intention to judge and condemn him; they were there to make inquisition for blood, and not one of them faltered in their stern task.

In answer to the King’s last speech Bradshaw said merely, ‘Sir, I have received direction from the Court.’

The King sat down.

‘Well, sir,’ he said, and looked about him with utter haughtiness.

‘The Court will proceed to sentence,’ continued the Lord President, ‘if you have nothing more to say.’

Lord Digby and many others held their breath: would the King, even now, disdain to answer to his charge?

He looked at Bradshaw and very faintly smiled.

‘Sir,’ he said, ‘I have nothing more to say, but I shall desire that this may be entered—what I have said.’

‘The Court, sir, hath something more to say to you,’ said Bradshaw, ‘which, although I know it will be very unacceptable, yet they are resolved to discharge their duty. Sir, you speak very well of a precious thing, which you call Peace, and it is much to be wished that God had put it into

your heart that you had as effectually and really endeavoured and studied the peace of the kingdom, as now in words you do pretend—but, as you were told the other day, actions must expound intentions—yet your actions have been clean contrary.'

In this strain the speech continued, delivered with clearness, with force and point, yet with a rapidity that strained the speed of the licensed penmen who were taking down the report of the trial.

Bradshaw spoke with learning, with eloquence, with weight and fire; yet what he said was but a repetition of the old grounds the Parliament had taken since the beginning of the war; the law was above the King. The King had defied the law and was therefore answerable.

He cited many precedents, quoted many authorities, but he could not disguise the illegality of the tribunal over which he presided, or cloak the fact that the King was being judged by means as outside the law as his had been when he had cast Sir John Eliot into the Tower or forced John Hampton to pay ship money.

Charles, listening to an indictment such as no king had ever listened to before, in a situation in which no king had ever been before, sat perfectly still, holding the herbs to his nostrils.

To him this talk was mere waste of air; he was, as he had said, as good a lawyer as any in the kingdom, and he knew that the Court which Bradshaw so burningly justified had no shadow of legal right; he knew that he was the victim of force, and he knew that he was suffering, not so much for the offences which the Lord President laid to his charge, as because he had remained faithful to the Church of England and the Divine right of kings; he knew that if he had forsaken these two tenets even a few days ago when Lord Denbigh came to Windsor he might have been saved.

And he did not regret his firmness—even at this moment.

Once, when Bradshaw, appealing to history, said, 'You are the hundred and ninth King of Scotland,' he moved, and his look brightened as if he had been recalled from wandering thoughts to the present moment; and when

the Lord President spoke of the violent end of his grandmother, Mary Stewart, he started a little and frowned.

For the rest he was motionless and silent, save only when Bradshaw arraigned him as, 'Tyrant, traitor, murderer, and public enemy to the Commonwealth of England'; then he blushed and cried out, 'Ha!'

The Lord President, spurred afresh by this cry of defiance, proceeded to prove these charges against the King, reinforcing them with texts of Scripture, and so upbraiding and fiercely condemning the King that at last Charles, amid a general murmur and buzz of the Court, sprang to his feet.

'I would only desire one word before you give sentence,' he said, 'and that is that you hear me concerning those great imputations that you have laid to my charge!'

'Sir,' replied Bradshaw undauntedly, 'you must give me leave to go on—for I am not far from your sentence and your time is now past——'

Again Charles interrupted.

'But I desire that you will hear me a few words only—for truly whatever sentence you will put upon me in respect of those heavy imputations that I see by your speech you have put upon me—sir, it is very true that——'

'Sir,' said Bradshaw, with great sternness, 'I would not willingly, especially at this time, interrupt you in anything you have to say, but, sir, you have not owned us as a Court—you look upon us as a sort of people met together—and we know what language we receive from your party.'

'I know nothing of that!' exclaimed Charles contemptuously.

Bradshaw continued with the old bitter grievance: 'You disavow us as a Court'—and on that theme spoke a little longer, the King the while facing him, leaning forward eagerly, with clenched hands and white face, frowning.

'We cannot be unmindful of what the Scripture tells us, for to acquit the guilty is of equal abomination as to condemn the innocent. We may not acquit the guilty. What sentence the law affirms to a traitor, tyrant, a murderer, and a public enemy to the country, that sentence you are now to hear read unto you, and that is the sentence of the Court.'

There was a great movement in the Hall as of a wave

advancing, then flung back. Oliver Cromwell put his hands before his face ; the King did not move.

‘ Read the sentence,’ said Bradshaw. ‘ Make an oyer and command silence while the sentence is read.’

Which was done by the Clerk of the Court, and silence indeed fell—a silence which seemed to shudder.

The Clerk read over the charge from the parchment he held, and then proceeded—

‘ This charge being read unto him, he, the said Charles Stewart, was required to give his answer, but he refused to do so, and so expressed the several passages of his trial in refusing to answer. For all which Treasons and Crimes this Court doth adjudge that the said Charles Stewart, as a tyrant, traitor, murderer, and public enemy, shall be put to death by the severing of his head from his body.’

Terrible sighs broke from the spectators ; they swayed to and fro. The King, now the moment had come, looked incredulous.

‘ The sentence now read and published,’ said Bradshaw, ‘ is the Act, Sentence, Judgment, and Resolution of the whole Court.’

At this the sixty-eight judges stood up to show their assent.

‘ Will you hear me a word, sir ? ’ cried Charles.

‘ Sir,’ returned Bradshaw, ‘ you are not to be heard after the sentence.’

‘ No, sir ? ’

‘ No, sir—by your favour, sir. Guard, withdraw your prisoner.’

The partisans closed round Charles ; incredulous, outraged, he continued to protest.

‘ I may speak after the sentence—by your favour, sir, I may speak after the sentence—ever——’

The guards caught hold of him none too civilly.

‘ I say, sir, I do,’ cried the unfortunate King—then sternly to the soldier who had seized his arm, ‘ Hold !—by your favour the sentence, sir——’

They pushed and dragged him away. He raised his voice.

‘ I am not suffered for to speak ! Expect what justice other people will have ! ’

So, still incredulous, protesting, he was forced away, and the Court rose and went into the Painted Chamber.

Lord Digby made his way out of the crowd ; he found a dun mist over London and rows of Cromwell's Ironsides keeping guard outside the Hall.

As the King passed out with his guards on his way to Sir Robert Cotton's, one of these men called out, ' God bless you, sir ! ' and his officer struck him on the face.

' It is a severe punishment for a little offence,' said Charles. He was now quite calm.

The mist deepened, blotting out the surging crowd, some of whom wept and some of whom were silent, but none of whom openly rejoiced.

CHAPTER X

EXIT THE KING

THE Dutch Ambassador interceded for the King ; the Queen and the Prince of Wales wrote, offering to accept any conditions Parliament might require if only the King might be spared ; but the stern enthusiasts who had resolved to sacrifice the blood of the tyrant were not to be turned from their purpose now by any entreaty or threat whatever ; the thing they were about to do was awful, incredible to the whole world, but they were not to be stopped now. The Scottish Commissioners spoke for the King, too, but in vain ; neither they nor the others got any answer.

That day, Monday, the King was permitted to take leave of the only two of his children left in England—the Duke of Gloucester and the Princess Elisabeth ; that day Oliver Cromwell and his colleagues signed the death-warrant at Whitehall.

The next day was appointed for the execution ; the King slept that night at St. James's Palace, but Oliver Cromwell, in the rich chamber in Whitehall, slept not at all, but prayed from candlelight to dawn, then armed himself and went out to meet the other commissioners who were in the banqueting hall, urging that the workmen be hastened

with the scaffold in front of the Palace, which was not yet ready, nor did look to be ready before the King came.

Charles slept ; neither dreams nor visions disturbed him, and when he woke, two hours before the dawn, he remembered everything at once, very clearly.

He remembered that he was to die to-day, that he had taken leave of his children and given Elisabeth two diamond seals for her mother. . . . He remembered that he would never see the Queen again, and that he left her in exile dependent on her sister-in-law, the Regent of France.

And as he got out of bed he remembered Lord Strafford.

He dressed himself with great slowness and care in the clothes he had worn during his trial ; he put on two shirts and a blue silk vest, for it was cold and he had no wish to shiver ; he exactly adjusted the black and silver, the Flemish lace, the knots of ribbon ; he combed his hair and arranged it in the long, smooth ringlets. . . . Once or twice while he was dressing he paused.

‘ O God,’ he said, ‘ am I—the King—going to die to-day ? ’

He was still incredulous ; it seemed to himself that his feelings were suspended. He moved mechanically ; he had an almost childish anxiety not to tremble ; he kept holding out his right hand and looking at it ; when he saw that it was steady he smiled.

When he came to fasten his doublet he went to the mirror framed in embroidery and tortoiseshell, which hung at the foot of his bed, and then he noticed that his face was slightly distorted—at one side drawn with a strange contraction. . . . Yet he told himself that he felt quite calm ; he tried to smooth that look away from his features with his fingers, then moved away abruptly and opened the window.

He wondered what Strafford had looked like just before his death, and it came to him that he was enduring what Strafford had endured—minute by minute the same—he was also the same age as Strafford had been, to the very year.

He sat down in the great arm-chair by the bed and tried to think ; what a failure his life had been, what a collapse of all hopes and ambitions—how incomplete ; he was very,

very weary of the long struggle which he had maintained so unyieldingly, and not sorry to have it ended.

Yet it was an awful thing to die this way—and so suddenly.

Only a month ago he had been at Windsor, firmly believing that his enemies would destroy each other, firmly believing that he would once more come to Whitehall, a king, and hang all these rebels and traitors.

And now it was all over, all the hopes and fears, suspenses and agitations, all the struggles and defeats and intrigues; there were only a few hours of time left, and only one thing more to do—to die decently.

He put on his shoes with the big crimson roses, his light sword, his George with the collar of knots and roses, his black velvet cloak; then as the dawn began to blur the candlelight, Bishop Juxon, whose attendance had been permitted him, came to him. It was this Bishop who had urged him not to assent to Strafford's death—how well both men remembered that now—across all the tumultuous events which lay between—how well!

Charles rose.

'I thank you for your loyalty, my lord,' he said; and then he was silent, for he thought that his voice sounded unnatural.

'May Your Majesty wake to-morrow so glorified that you will forget to-day!' replied the Bishop.

'To-morrow!' repeated Charles absently. 'Ay, to-morrow—you will get up to-morrow and move and eat—ay, to-morrow——'

'To-morrow thou wilt be in Paradise, sire,' replied Juxon firmly, and a sincere hope and courage shone in his eyes, which were red and swollen with weeping.

'I die for the Church of England,' said the King quickly. 'They may say what they will, but if I had abandoned Episcopacy I might have lived.'

'God knoweth it,' answered the Bishop solemnly, 'and men will know it after a little while.'

Charles took up his hat, his gloves, his cane, and without speaking followed the Bishop into the little royal chapel where he had so often worshipped in happier times.

He took the Sacrament ; when the ceremony was over a calm, almost a lethargy, fell on his spirits ; he tried to think of great and tremendous things, of what was behind him and what was before him, but his brain slipped from them ; even the Queen had become absolutely remote. He found himself wondering how Strafford had felt at this same moment in his life.

When he left the chapel he went to one of the ante-chambers and waited.

‘ The omens were against me from the first,’ he said suddenly. ‘ I was crowned in white, like a shroud, and at my coronation sermon the text was : “ Be thou faithful unto Death and I will give thee a crown of Eternal Life ” ; then my flag was blown down at Nottingham—and the other day, at what they call my trial, the head fell off my cane.’

This speech showed that his mind still ran on worldly things ; but Juxon seized hold on a portion of his words with which to give him comfort.

‘ Thou hast been faithful unto death,’ he said, ‘ and to-day will enter on to Eternal Life.’

‘ I said I would rather die than betray the Church of England,’ answered Charles, ‘ and I have redeemed it to the letter.’

As he spoke there entered unceremoniously Colonel Hacker, one of the three officers appointed to convey him to Whitehall.

Charles rose with such majesty and undaunted dignity that the stout Puritan was, for a moment, abashed, and held out his warrant in silence.

‘ I submit to your power, but I defy your authority,’ said the King contemptuously, and with that clapped on his hat and followed the officer, Juxon following him.

When they reached the fresh air Charles felt a new vigour, a certain excitement ; in all the depth of his fall and the bitterness of his humiliation, in all the extreme of his failure and the mightiness of his defeat, he had his own inner triumph. He might be broken but he was not bent ; he died a King, not yielding a jot of his rights, bequeathing to his son a lost heritage, but one uncurtailed by any concession of his. He was dying for his beliefs—because

he would not forgo them they were killing him ; he found satisfaction in that thought.

When he came to where his escort of guards waited, he cried out in his usual tone of authority, ' March on apace ! '

It was now about ten o'clock ; the heavy air had hardly lifted over London, but it was pleasant in the Park, and from the bare fields and hedgerows beyond came a waft of winter freshness ; all the view was blocked by people and regiment upon regiment of soldiers, all motionless and expressionless.

' It is an ordinary day,' said Charles, ' like a hundred other days, but it shall long be marked with red in England's calendar.'

The people, overawed by the soldiers and by the terror of the occasion, were strangely silent as he passed ; the prevailing emotion seemed a desperate curiosity, as if they waited, breathless, to know if this horrific thing could really come to pass.

The King thought of nothing but of how Strafford had walked so. . . .

When he came to Whitehall he was conducted to his own bedchamber ; there was a fire burning and a breakfast laid for him. In these familiar surroundings, where some of the happy moments of his splendid life had been spent, a faint horror came over him, and he felt his knees tremble ; he found, too, that a physical sickness touched him at the sight of the food.

' I have taken the Sacrament,' he said briefly. Then he asked of the soldiers still attending him—' How long ? '—and they told him ' Till the scaffold was finished.'

' It is terrible,' said Charles to the Bishop, ' to wait.'

The Commissioners were waiting too. Oliver Cromwell was in the boarded gallery, and with him was one Nunelly, the doorkeeper to the committee of the army, who had a warrant of £50,000 to deliver to the Lieutenant-General, with them were Major Harrison and Mr. Hugh Peters.

' O Lord ! ' cried this last, ' what mercy to see this great city fall down before us ! And what a stir there is to bring this great man to justice, without whose blood he would turn us all to blood had he reigned again ! '

Oliver Cromwell took the packet from Nunelly ; he

was quite white, and his hand shook so that twice the package dropped.

‘Nunelly,’ he said hoarsely, ‘will you see the beheading of the King—surely you will see the beheading of the King?’

And without waiting for an answer he began to pace up and down, in uncontrollable agitation and excitement.

And presently Hugh Peters and Richard Nunelly went out into the banqueting hall, and out of the centre window on to the scaffold where the joiners were yet at work driving staples in.

When they returned to the boarded gallery, Cromwell and Harrison were still there.

‘This will be a good day,’ said Peters.

‘Are you not afraid that it will be a bloody day to all England?’ asked Nunelly fearfully.

‘This is not a thing done in a corner,’ replied Harrison calmly, ‘but before the world. I follow not my own poor judgment, but the revealed word of God in His Holy Scriptures.’

Cromwell turned to Peters who stood in his black cloak and hat like death’s own herald.

‘Is it ready?’ he asked. ‘Why this delay—this intolerable delay?’

His voice shook as he spoke.

‘Are the vizards ready?’ he asked again.

‘Ay, it is Brandon the hangman and the fellow Hulet, and they are to have thirty pounds apiece—and now, I think, Colonel Hacker may go to fetch the King,’ replied Peters.

‘Will you see him pass?’ asked Harrison.

‘I will not look on him again, alive or dead!’ replied Cromwell sombrely.

But Peters and Nunelly went to an upper window where they might have a good view. . . .

In his bedchamber the King still waited; the soldiers had withdrawn and left him alone with Juxon, to whom the dying man gave his last instructions, and one, above all, important.

‘Let my son forgive his father’s murderers—and let *him* always maintain the Church of England and his own royal

rights in this realm—let him make no compromise on these points. And let my younger sons never be cajoled into taking their brother's place—my son Charles, who, in a few moments now, will be King of England and Scotland.'

'I promise,' said Juxon.

Then the King rose and walked up and down.

'Jesus, God!' he cried, 'spare me this waiting!'

'I implore Your Majesty to eat and drink a little,' entreated the Bishop, and Charles, who felt himself indeed sick and faint, drank a glass of claret and eat a piece of bread. When he had finished he took a white satin cap from his pocket and gave it to Juxon, also his watch, with some broken words of thanks. Then Colonel Hacker came, and the King turned to go through the splendid galleries of his old home to his death.

He had his hat on and said not a word; beneath his composure he was struggling to overcome the physical weakness that beset him, rendering him incapable of high thoughts; the sensitive flesh shrank from what it had to face; already he felt a ring of pain round his neck.

The fine apartments, the paintings, the rich furniture still there, swam dizzily before his eyes; but he walked firmly. . . .

Colonel Hacker led the way; they stepped through the centre window of the banqueting hall on to a scaffold hung with black, on which stood the two vizards or headsmen; both of whom wore frieze breeches and coats—one had a grey beard showing beneath the mask, the other was disguised with a light wig. When Charles stepped out of the window he recoiled with a repulsion no pride could control. In the foreground the two black figures, and beyond a sea of white faces, all looking at him; even the soldiers, horse and foot, their red coats and steel brightening the grey morning, were looking at him—all in silence.

His glance fell to the block. 'Is it so low?' he asked, in a horrified way. Then he recovered himself and turned to the few about him.

'It was the Parliament began the war, not I,' he said, 'but I hope they may be guiltless too, and all blame may go to the ill instruments which came between us'—here one of the officers touched the axe, and the King cried out

—‘Take care of the axe! take care of the axe!’—resuming afterwards his speech. ‘The government rests with the King and not with the people, in that belief and in the faith of the Church of England I die.’

He laid off his cloak and hat, then added with great wistfulness—

‘In one respect I suffer justly, and that is because I have permitted an unjust sentence to be executed on another.’

He took off his George and the little miniature of the Queen (which he kissed), and gave them to Juxon.

He gave a purse of guineas to the grey-bearded vizard with the axe, who knelt to ask his pardon, and again that awful sickness closed over his heart.

‘Take care they do not put me to pain,’ he said to Colonel Hacker, and his lips trembled. Then to the man, ‘I shall say but very short prayers, and then thrust out my hands—at this sign do you strike.’

‘I will warrant, sir,’ said Colonel Hacker, ‘the fellow is skilful.’

The King now took off his doublet, sword, and sword-string, doing it carefully that he might gain time for perfect composure at the supreme minute.

Juxon approached him.

‘Your Majesty hath but one more stage to travel in this weary world, and though that is a turbulent and troublesome stage, it is a short one, and will carry Your Majesty all the way from earth to heaven.’

Charles looked at St. James’s Palace showing beyond the multitude of faces.

‘I have a good cause and a gracious God on my side,’ he said. He took the white satin cap from the Bishop, and put his hair up in it; a slight figure he looked now in the straight blue vest and white cap.

The church bells struck half-past twelve, the sluggard sun sent faint rays through the low winter clouds. The King knelt down. ‘Remember,’ he said to Juxon.

A great excitement steadied him, driving away the sickness; this was the end, the end—and after?

He placed his forehead in the niche of the block; the position was uncomfortable, and he was staring down at the black covering of the scaffold floor.

He closed his eyes, clutching his hands on his breast ; he felt the keen air on his bare neck, and confused visions leaped before him. He tried to pray.

‘ Lord Jesus,’ he murmured swiftly. ‘ Lord Jesus ——’ he could think of nothing more ; with an almost mechanical movement he threw out his hands.

He heard the headsman step nearer ; he set his teeth.

The axe struck cleanly ; the blood was over all of them, and the vizard with the light wig held up by the long grey curls the head which had bounded to his feet.

‘ God save the people of England !’ said Colonel Hacker.

A deep and awful groan broke from the multitude, and the soldiers, hitherto immovable, turned about in all directions, clearing the streets.

PART IV

THE ACHIEVEMENT

‘We are Englishmen; that is one good account. And if God give a nation valour and courage, it is honour and a mercy.’—OLIVER P., 1656, *Speech to Parliament, Tuesday, 16th Sept., in the Painted Chamber.*

‘I was by birth a gentleman living neither in any considerable height nor yet in obscurity. I have been called to several employments in the nation. . . . I did endeavour to discharge the duty of an honest man in those services.’—OLIVER P., *ibid.*, 12th Sept. 1654

‘If my calling be from God and my testimony from the People—only God and the People will take it from me, else I shall not part with it—I should be false to the trust that God hath placed in me, and to the interest of the people of these nations if I should.’—OLIVER P., *ibid.*

CHAPTER I

‘THE CROWNING MERCY’

ON a soft golden blue day in September 1651 a crowd was gathered in the streets of London—a crowd as vast and as excited as that which had waited to hear the verdict on Lord Strafford, or had thronged to witness the awful scene outside Whitehall when the King knelt before the headsman.

On both these occasions the people were awestruck and silenced. Now they were triumphant openly, rejoicing almost light-heartedly; the King had died a traitor's death and the skies had not fallen; other great men had followed him in his final fate, and none had avenged them. The present Charles Stewart, called the King of Scots since his coronation at Scone, was flying the country, a proscribed fugitive; the Commonwealth, proclaimed after the death of the late King, was a year and a half old and had shown no signs of weakness nor unstability, and to-day

the people were got together to welcome home the Lieutenant-General, Oliver Cromwell, who was returning after having subdued Ireland and Scotland as those Islands had never yet been subdued.

Fire and sword had swept Ireland from coast to coast ; Cromwell had not spared the enemies of the Lord, as Drogheda could witness, Papist priests had been hanged or knocked on the head, Papist garrisons massacred, Papist peasants transported, Papist gentry forbidden their religion, and driven from their estates into the desolate regions of Connaught.

Next, he turned against Scotland, where the second Charles, having denounced the faith of his father, and the religion of his mother, having taken the Covenant (submitting in a moment to those things which the late King had died rather than yield to), was setting up once more the standard of the Stewarts.

Cromwell (now Lord-General, for Fairfax, too cold and meticulous for these times, had retired) met the Scots at Dunbar and beat Lord Leven and David Leslie as thoroughly as he had beaten Hamilton at Preston, and with troops as tired, hungry, and outnumbered, as they had been hungry and outnumbered then. Dunbar Drove they called this, as they had called the other Preston Rout.

Both were mighty victories.

Then, a year later, on the 3rd of September, the anniversary of Dunbar, Cromwell, supported by Lambert and Harrison, marched to meet another invading army of Scots headed by the young Charles, and on the banks and bridges of the Severn and in the streets of Worcester city, beat them again, ruining completely the cause of the young Stewart, who watched the day from the cathedral tower, then fled, hopeless, not to Scotland, but beyond seas, this time to seek an asylum at his sister's court.

That was the end of it. Cromwell had subdued kings and kingdoms ; there was no one left to lead any army across the Border or ships across St. George's Channel, and neither of the sister islands would be likely to attempt to measure swords with England again. There were no more gallant Cavaliers to rise up for a lost cause. Montrose

had been hanged in Edinburgh, and the young King for whom he died had repudiated him almost before the heroic soul had left the gallant body. Hamilton, Capel, Holland, Derby, had suffered on the block, kissing the axe that had slain their master ; the rest were beyond seas, in exile and poverty, or in their own country outnumbered, forlorn, impoverished, and silenced.

And the man who had thus achieved the triumphs of his cause and his beliefs, the soldier who had been victorious in every engagement he had undertaken, whose enthusiasm, fire, and faith had heartened his party when even the bravest had been daunted, was the man who was riding into London to-day, welcomed by salvos of artillery and pealing of bells.

Five of the foremost members of Parliament had ridden out to meet him on his march. One of the royal palaces, that of Hampton, had been given him as a residence ; he enjoyed now a grant of nearly six thousand a year, and in his train, as he entered London, were many of the noblest in the country, and with him rode the Lord Mayor, the Speaker, the Council of State, the Aldermen, and Sheriffs.

With a modesty that was absolutely unaffected he declined all credit for his overwhelming victories ; and with a simplicity some mistook for irony (but irony was not in his nature), he remarked of the huge multitude which had gathered to see him pass : ‘ There would be even more to see me hanged,’ so exactly did he value the popular favour, and so completely was he aware of the peril of the height on which he stood.

When the triumphal entry was over and evening was closing in, he turned at last to his own home.

One sadness marred the return ; Henry Ireton had died in Ireland, worn out by the fatigues of the strenuous campaign which had more than once laid the Lord-General himself on a bed of sickness, and Bridget Ireton was shut into her house, mourning her lord, whose body was being brought home for burial in the Abbey Church at Westminster.

The rest were all there to welcome him ; his mother, his wife, his son Richard, now at last wedded to Dorothy

Mayor (Henry was still in Ireland, doing good work there), Elisabeth Claypole and her husband, and the two unmarried girls, Mary and Frances.

The women wept, in their enthusiasm and joyful relief. Elisabeth Claypole hung on his breast in a passion of tears, so completely did the sadness of the world overwhelm her sensitive heart in any moment of emotion.

Almost her first words were to ask his kindness towards the poor Irish who were being sent to Jamaica and Barbadoes as slaves. After all Cromwell's victories his favourite daughter's delicate voice had risen with the same appeal : ‘ Be merciful, be pitiful—spare the prisoners ! ’

‘ Why do you weep, Betty ? ’ he asked.

‘ Because she is a foolish wench,’ said her husband good-humouredly.

‘ Nay,’ said Elisabeth Cromwell, ‘ what doth your old poet say—“ pity runneth soon in a gentle heart ” ; and we have had to bear some straining anxieties.’

‘ And we have heard awful reports,’ murmured Mrs. Claypole, smiling through her tears with that simple archness which her father loved, however he might condemn her carnal mind. ‘ Blood—nothing but blood was spoken of, until my dreams were coloured red.’

‘ Ay,’ said old Mrs. Cromwell, with the vagueness of her great age. ‘ Hast thou not slain the children of the Scarlet Woman by tens of thousands ? I heard that at Drogheda thou didst close the blasphemous idolaters into their own church, and there burn them, as an offering of sweet savour in the nostrils of the Lord.’

Cromwell glanced at his daughter Elisabeth, and answered nothing ; the cries of the burning Papists echoed sometimes in his own heart for all his stern exaltation in slaying the enemies of God. For a moment his brow clouded, but the subject was swept away and forgotten in the congratulations, questions, and answers of Mr. Claypole and Richard Cromwell. The times were still momentous, even perilous ; now there was peace what would they and all the other men of England do ?

While the Lord-General talked with these two, the women took the old gentlewoman to her room ; she could hardly walk now and her senses were failing, the Bible

was constantly in her hands, and she spoke of little else but her son.

When she had reached the chamber set apart for her, she got into her chair by the window and looked at the sunset a little, half-dozing and talking to herself, then she roused suddenly and asked Mrs. Claypole, who tenderly remained with her, to 'Fetch your father, child, fetch your father. I have had little of him but the pain of his absences, and I would see him now!'

Elisabeth Claypole, light-footed and delicate in her glimmering white and blue silks, sped on her errand, taking with her some of the last late roses with which she had adorned her grandmother's room.

When she gave her message she slipped the stems of two of them through the buttonhole of her father's dusty uniform. Their gay beauty looked incongruous enough on his sober attire, but though his lips chid her, his eyes smiled, and he let the blossoms remain.

Elisabeth Cromwell was wondering, in sentences half-awed, half-vexed, how she should keep house in a great place like Hampton Court?—how many servants must she have, and how could they use such a number of rooms?

'We will come and stay with thee,' said Dorothy, Richard's wife, who was not averse to her share of her father-in-law's splendour. Her pretty face was very bright and smiling to-day above the demure fall of her lawn collar, and her gown was new silk, embroidered in a fashion not uncourtly; her husband, too, was habited with a richness beyond his father's. The Lord-General had not failed to mark his son's wide, Spanish boots, fringed breeches, grey cloth passemented with rose-colour, and Malines lace collar and fall. It did not please him, for he took it as another indication of that weakness and levity which he had before suspected, with a terrible pang, in his eldest surviving son.

He made no reply to Dorothy Cromwell, but followed his daughter to her grandmother's room.

Oliver Cromwell crossed the room, which was dark and plain, but full of the odour of dry rose leaves and lavender and camphire, and stood before his mother who sat by the window, a small shrivelled gentlewoman in a hooded chair.

She lifted her blurred eyes and held out her two little hands to him; he kissed them, and then as Elisabeth Claypole left them he broke forth, 'Mother, I am tired, tired.'

He rested his sick head against the mullions and gazed up at the little strip of sky, glorious with floating clouds of light, visible above the houses opposite.

'How is it with thee, my son Oliver?' she asked. 'Thou art come in triumph with much acclaim, but hast thou within the peace of God, which passeth all understanding?'

He answered with a fervour and a quickness which was like the passion of self-justification yet ennobled by his usual enthusiasm.

'I have followed the pillar of cloud by day,' he answered, 'the pillar of fire by night. I have disregarded the wind and the whirlwind, and I have listened for the still small voice. *I believe God hath been with me because of the victories I have had.*'

'Surely,' replied Mrs. Cromwell, 'He hath witnessed for thee as He witnessed against the King. Is not this fight at Worcester spoken of on all tongues as the crowning mercy?'

The Lord-General continued to look at the sky which was fast paling from flame tints into a burning paleness, like gold in a furnace, thrice refined.

'For nine years I have laboured,' he said, 'and not once hath the Lord put me down. Yet sometimes the voice will fail, sometimes the Sign will not come—sometimes I even seem to fall from grace—sometimes I wonder why I ever left obscurity. Yet the Lord called me! I will maintain it—He held up my hands and made me His instrument! I have been one with the Spirit; I say it was God's work, for He did not put me down! Now, it were better that I should lay aside my high office and return to what I was.'

'It were better,' said the old gentlewoman; 'but can England spare you yet? For me, I would rather die where I have lived than amid these splendours.'

'I will go back to my own place,' continued Oliver Cromwell. 'I have done what God set me to do—I have swept the enemy from the land, I have seen the tyrant

slain, and his children exiled. When shall the young man, Charles Stewart, get another army? Nay, when he fled from Worcester city, he fled from his throne for ever; his forces are scattered and no captain out of Egypt shall ever get them together again. I say the land is purged, and what work is there for me?’

He was silent a moment, then he added, ‘I am weary and still something sick.’

These recent sicknesses of his troubled him; he could not understand the fault for which this weakness had been laid on him. Following out his own thoughts he broke into speech again.

‘As for Drogheda, *I say it was in the heat of action*, and were they not Papists, blasphemous idolaters whose hands were red with the blood of God’s poor people? *It was in the heat of action!* What was that little moment compared to the torments of hell they have earned? When they were shut up in the church and the flames were getting hold on them, I heard one say—“God damn me, God confound me, I burn!” That is God’s judgment. God *hath* damned him—to the flame that is never quenched and the worm that never dieth! Poor clay am I, but a reed He breatheth through—shall I be blamed for His vengeance against Drogheda? Nay, no more than I shall be praised for His victories at Dunbar and Worcester—when He was pleased to make use of a certain poor thing of mine, nay, a little invention, the army.’

The ancient gentlewoman leant forward and stroked his sleeve with her pallid hand thickened with heavy veins. She had an instinct that he required comforting in this the highest moment of his glory.

He still wore his buff riding coat, his dusty boots, his plain sword-thread and sword; surely no victorious general had ever returned to take his triumph in such attire. No order, no ornament distinguished him from the meanest of his fellow-citizens; his features, always heavy, were slightly swollen and slightly suffused, his eyes most deeply lined and shadowed; there was as much grey as brown now in the locks that fell to his shoulders, and a general sadness was in his expression, his pose, the tone of his rough voice.

His little mother continued to anxiously stroke his cloth sleeve and to gaze up at him with those failing eyes which saw neither marks of age nor fatigue, saw neither plainness nor ill-health, but only *her* son in the glory of his matchless achievement.

CHAPTER II

THE TALK IN ST. JAMES'S PARK

THE Council of State had done well ; great names were among the members. Sir Harry Vane had devoted his patriotism and his great gifts to the administration of the navy, which was under the command of William Blake, already as renowned at sea as Cromwell on the land ; the naval war with the United Provinces was already taxing the resources of the infant Commonwealth, and so far all had acquitted themselves with honour and distinction.

Rupert and his roving pirate ships had been swept from the seas, Deane and Monk kept an iron hand on Scotland, Fleetwood and Ludlow completed the bloody conquest of Ireland. Outwardly the new Republic might well present a uniform and solid appearance ; but within it seethed with confusion.

The main cause of the two civil wars and the execution of the King—ecclesiastical questions—was still in abeyance ; nothing was settled in Church or State. Nor were the finances of the country in a hopeful condition ; neither the Church lands nor the King's lands nor all the revenues formerly given to royalty served to pay the expenses of the Dutch War. Cromwell's dreams of retirement vanished ; urged from within by his own eager soul and from without by the appeals of those who could not bear their burdens without his help, he remained in the forefront of affairs, the leader of the army in name and fact, a figure slightly enigmatical, needed by all and by some feared.

He was not without his enemies. Edmund Ludlow, on one of his visits to London, told him frankly that the

extreme Puritans could not forget his attempt to come to terms with the late King, and the extreme moderates could not forget his execution of the mutineers at Ware.

The last time Ludlow and Cromwell had crossed words Cromwell had ended the argument by hurling a cushion at his opponent's head. Now he answered mildly and declared that the Lord was bringing to pass through him what He had promised in the 110th Psalm ; he expounded this theory for an hour, and Ludlow was silenced by rhetoric if not convinced by reason.

Meanwhile Cromwell, whether he silenced his critics by oratory or hurled cushions, went his way without heeding any of them ; sometimes mildly, sometimes in sudden gusts of temper, sometimes in strange exalted excitements he pursued a policy which, however obscure and vague it might seem to others, was clear as crystal and bright as flame to him.

The feeling between the army and the remnant of Charles' last Parliament still ruling at Westminster became again restless and intense ; all men began to see that the present Government was, and could be nothing else, but provisional. A date, three years off, was fixed for the dissolution of the present Parliament, and Cromwell called a conference between the chief lawyers and the chief captains, to whom he offered two vital questions : Should they have a republic or a monarchy ? if a monarchy, who was to be King ?

The Parliament men were mostly for a monarchy, the army men for a republic : Desborough and Whalley were especially strong for that.

Oliver Cromwell was not with them : he had never been at heart republican ; but he said little, and the conference broke up, as the others had done, without solving a single difficulty.

Sometime after the Lord-General, coming from his luminous obscurity where he gleamed, keeping all men in an uncertainty as to his wishes and his intentions, asked the Lord Whitelocke, lawyer and Parliament man, to attend him in his walking in the Park, and to there discuss with him the unsettlement and turmoil of the State.

It was a day in November ; the brambles in the hedges

had sparse fox-coloured leaves ; the trees in the orchard and orchery ground were bare ; the elms and oaks were hung with thin scattered gold leaves against a pale blue and frosty sky ; the ground was hard with a thin ice in the ruts where yesterday had been mud ; above the empty Palace, which might be plainly glimpsed through the bare trees, a solitary white cloud floated, like a forlorn banner. The Lord-General often looked at this cloud while he spoke : he had a habit of gazing much at the sky.

He wore a black suit and grey worsted hose, broad leathern shoes with wide steel buckles, sword, band, collar, and hat as plain as might be. There was nothing about his person to indicate the profession which he represented ; he was in every way as plain as the plain lawyer to whom he talked. He opened with what was in his mind, but gently, indirectly and vaguely, after his usual manner.

'Where is the cause ? Where is this for which we all fought ? Lord Whitelocke, did so many poor people die to this end ? Was the glorious climax of the war, the death of the tyrant to lead to no better conclusion than this ? Hath the Lord led us out of Egypt to abandon us now ? Truly, sir, I do not think it, yet I ask you where is the cause ? I say that the cause is overlaid with jars, with jealousies, with confusion, and this must not be. The Lord will not have it—it is not as it should be, sir, in a Commonwealth.'

Bulstrode Whitelocke hesitated a moment and struck at the frozen ground with his cane ; he was a shrewd, prosaic man, a keen lawyer, and a fearless patriot. After his little pause he resolved on boldness : his quick, direct speech was a contrast to Cromwell's involved phrases.

'The peril we are in, sir, cometh from the arrogance of the army, from their high pretensions and unruly ways and desire for dominance.'

The Lord-General gave him a long glance.

'Say you so ?' he returned mildly. 'Yet methinks they are a lovely company, worthy of all honour.'

'They have had all honour and all profit too,' returned Whitelocke grimly, 'and now they would have all power as well, under your favour, sir.'

'Nay,' returned Cromwell, 'this is not so. The army is the poor instrument by which the Lord saved England; they did some little service at Naseby—at Preston—at Dunbar and Winchester, and though I dare say they would sooner die than take any of the glory of these mercies, yet the Lord chose them as His instruments, and that must be accounted to them as an honour. Sir, the army hath laboured much, sweated in your service; sir, without the army'—he pointed to Whitehall—'that Palace would now be the dwelling-place of the young man, Charles Stewart. I pray you consider these things.'

'Yet I repeat,' insisted the Lord Whitelocke, who was voicing the feeling of the entire Parliament and a great portion of the nation, 'that the army is the cause of these present jars—their imperious carriage is hard to be borne, sir, and from it arises the confusions and jealousies which oppress us. As to their merits, the Council of State hath done somewhat too—the war with the Dutch——'

'Because of this war my spirit hath groaned!' interrupted Cromwell. 'Should there not rather be a union between two Protestant republics than war? And what do not you spend on it? All that which you have gained from King and bishops. I say it were more befitting us, as Christians and Englishmen, to have peace with the Dutch.'

Whitelocke refused to be drawn into this argument. He returned to his point.

'The Council of State rule well and wisely—the people uphold them.'

'Nay, do they?' interrupted the Lord-General, in a very decided tone. 'I tell you this, Mr. Whitelocke, I have been up and down the country and heard the opinions of many men, and I say that most, and the best of them, do loathe the Parliament.'

'Where is this leading?' asked the lawyer sharply.

'Ay, where?' repeated Cromwell. 'There are the people new come from civil strife unheard of, and ye lay on them the great burden of a foreign war; ye settle nothing and strive after nothing but to prolong your own sitting. There are scandalous members among you—ay, I know it well—self-seekers, drunkards, men of lewd life.'

I say it is not well these should be uncontrolled in power, therefore I spoke for a king or for one with a king's authority. They have none to check them, they do as they will, they are slow, they are idle, they meddle in private matters ; it will not do. Let them look to their authority, which is on high ; let them seek God painfully.'

He spoke with passion now, but also with a certain weariness, as if he was oppressed with great thoughts and slowly struggled to the outward expression of them.

'You are a soldier and therefore impatient,' returned Whitelocke quietly. 'The Parliament is slow—but that is within human reason.'

The Lord-General turned and looked at him grimly.

'There is another thing which is not within human reason, which is that this Commonwealth should stand without a master set over the Parliament.'

'How may one do that ?' demanded the lawyer sharply, 'when the Parliament is itself the authority from which we derive ours ?'

'That is a formal difficulty,' replied Cromwell impatiently. 'Do you think I should be stopped by nice points of law ?'

Whitelocke marked the pronoun the soldier had used.

'Would you withstand the Parliament ?' he asked keenly. 'They are your masters.'

'They are no man's masters ; they are means to an end,' replied Cromwell. 'I am a poor thing, but the Lord hath made some use of me these ten years past—yea, a little use. He hath been pleased to appoint me to do a few things for him, some little work, and I will do it, despite Parliament as I did and despite a king. I say we will have righteousness and justice ; if need be these men can be put down as the tyrant was put down, and the poor and simple be cared for and the groans of the needy heard.'

'These are stern words,' said Whitelocke ; 'and how will you justify them ?'

'God will justify them,' replied the Lord-General, 'as He hath hitherto upheld what I have said in His name. What was I ? What did I know of armies or of the battalion ? Yet the Lord said, "Be thou ruler, even

among Mine enemies," and sent me forth to conquer kings and princes. And we were but a handful and they gentlemen. Yet we did it. "With His own right hand and with His holy arm hath He gotten Himself the victory!" And now I am bidden to labour still in His cause and to go forward—and do you think that poor remnant sitting at Westminster shall hinder me?' "

The Lord Whitelocke was silent; he was rather startled at what he took to be the kernel of Cromwell's speech—his enmity to the Parliament—and he was not deceived by the gentleness and self-effacement of the Lord-General, who, he knew, was indeed capable of doing away with the Parliament as he and his had done away with the King. And there was now, as always, the great fact to be remembered and reckoned with that Cromwell had behind him the army of his own creation, that fierce military whose enthusiasm was not much curbed or checked by regard for mere formal institutions and laws of men's framing.

'In very deed,' he replied, 'your power and the power behind you is too high. How can we withstand it?'

'My power, such as it be,' returned the soldier mildly, 'cometh from God and the People. Be assured that if I use it for other than the glory of one and the good of the other it will pass from me. I say this because meseemeth you have fear of the army, poor souls; but I did not open this talk for any matter of argument with thee, but rather in a friendly spirit to discuss the present jars.'

'You have discussed them to good purpose, sir,' returned Whitelocke dryly. 'I perceive that you look upon the Parliament and the Council of State with ill-will and mistrust.'

'I think,' replied Cromwell, still gazing at the pale cloud floating in the pale sky over Whitehall, 'that we need a Governor over this England.'

'Where is he to be found?' demanded Whitelocke.

'The Lord will bring such an one forward in His good leisure,' said Cromwell.

Whitelocke liked this speech still less than those which had gone before it; he thought it meant that the Lord-General intended in truth to set himself against the Parliament.

'Who will be your Governor of England?' he asked.

'Who can resolve that question?' said Cromwell evasively.

'What is your proposal to solve the present difficulties?' was Whitelocke's next question. He was determined that he would, if possible, gain something definite from the present conversation.

The Lord-General made no answer, and they walked on slowly and in silence. The very last leaves were scattered from the boughs overhead on to the frosty ground at their feet, and a little low, sharp wind was blowing across the city.

Bulstrode Whitelocke waited for the Lord-General's answer. Himself a moderate man, to a point he was wholly with Cromwell's tolerance and large-mindedness; but when Cromwell's moderation suddenly culminated in daring action, then Whitelocke refused to follow him. He had been one of the most active of those who had endeavoured to frame a treaty with the late King, and had warmly supported Cromwell's attempts to bring Charles to a compromise; but he had refused to sit in the High Court of Justice that had tried and condemned the King. So now he felt that they were again reaching a crisis when he could not support any longer the man whom he so sincerely admired.

But the Lord-General would not any further disclose himself, and when Whitelocke was about to press for a reply he caused a distraction by pausing and pointing to a gentleman walking near the archery fields, to which they had now nearly approached.

'I know his face, who is he?' asked Cromwell.

Bulstrode Whitelocke, somewhat vexed at this abrupt change of subject, answered briefly—

'He is the Latin Secretary to the Council of State.'

'Ah,' said the Lord-General, 'a very worthy citizen. I have heard of him. From the first he hath given his testimony to the good cause. I would there were many more such among you.'

By this, the person of whom he spoke drew near, and seeing the two gentlemen, and knowing Whitelocke and recognizing Cromwell, he stopped and bowed.

Cromwell turned towards him, and Whitelocke had no choice but to do likewise.

‘ You are the Latin Secretary,’ said the Lord-General. ‘ You have written much in defence of the cause. I have often sought an occasion to speak to you.’

The gentleman thus addressed bowed in some confusion like one overwhelmed by a great honour.

‘ Do you know me ? ’ asked Cromwell.

‘ I do, my Lord-General,’ was the reply, given in a sweet musical voice. ‘ What lover of truth and freedom doth not ?—“ My lord fighteth the battles of the Lord, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days.” ’

He spoke with a warm sincerity which raised his words above the suspicion of flattery, and a flush overspread his naturally pallid features.

There was something about his person and manner wholly attractive ; in his youth (he was now in middle age) he must have been of a beauty almost feminine, and his traits still had a frail and delicate comeliness ; his large dark blue eyes were fatigued and heavy lidded as if swollen with overuse, and his pale cheek and the brow shaded by the long locks of brown hair bore traces of sickness and anxiety ; his figure was slender and noble, and his black clothes were fine in quality ; his whole appearance was of an elegance wholly lacking to the Lord-General’s person ; indeed, for all the sobriety of his attire, he appeared more like one of the unfortunate Cavaliers than one of the most vigorous champions of the Independents, the author of *Eikonoclastes*.

‘ I thank you, Mr. Milton,’ replied Cromwell. ‘ I hope we may be better acquainted. You have laboured much and your reward halts, but I believe you have that greatness in you which is pleased to serve England without fee.’

‘ For the little that I do I am even overpaid,’ replied John Milton, with a deepening of his boyish flush.

The glance of the two men met, and a look flashed between them as if they were wholly one in spirit ; then the Secretary bowed again, and each went his way.

‘ The Council have bidden him write an answer to Salmasius’ work,’ said Whitelocke. ‘ He calls it *A Defence of the People of England*—but it doth not proceed

as quickly as he would wish because his eyes fail him. He told me that at times he could hardly see the letters on the paper.'

Cromwell looked back at the slender, erect figure walking away under the bare trees.

'Thou hast a brave heart if I mistake not,' he murmured.

Then he went on again, Bulstrode Whitelocke still waiting for him to deliver himself.

Not until they had almost reached the confines of the Park and the houses of Charing Cross did the Lord-General speak.

Then, turning suddenly to his expectant companion, he said—

'What if a man should take it upon himself to be king?'

Whitelocke stared, startled beyond concealment.

'Well?' urged Cromwell gently.

The lawyer, recovering himself, took refuge in the pedantic, formal objections offered by the law and the constitution.

Cromwell listened patiently. When Whitelocke, rather confused and breathless, had brought his speech to an end he answered mildly—

'Neither the law nor the constitution gave authority for the execution of a king. Yet we did it. Therefore we may do other things for which there is no warrant in charter or Parliament roll, but for which the warrant cometh from God. Yet for the moment I have no more to say.'

CHAPTER III

EXIT THE PARLIAMENT

DURING these days the Lord-General and his colleagues, Harrison and Lambert, waited much on the Lord, confessing their sinfulness and asking for Divine help.

Behind them was always the army, demanding arrears of pay, work for the poor, and the suppression of the general lawlessness of the kingdom; there were many more conferences between the lawyers and the soldiers; towards the close of 1652 Cromwell gently, and Lambert

and Harrison not at all gently, began to say that it was the Lord's will that the Parliament should go. Parliament, they declared, should call a convention and then abdicate.

The gentlemen at Westminster, seeing the military saints were in earnest, set themselves to prepare a scheme of government which should meet the approval of the army; the wise and valiant Sir Harry Vane, the younger, drew up a bill to provide for a provisional government, the nucleus of which was to be the members now sitting, they who had been ever in the forefront of the fight since that fight had begun.

This scheme to give perpetuity to a body which they wished to completely abolish only further exasperated the army; Cromwell and Harrison pushed forward their own bill.

On the 19th of April, Vane and Cromwell and their several supporters held another conference in the suite of apartments in Whitehall Palace, now given to the Lord-General, at which both parties agreed to stay their hands until the discussion should be resumed and brought to some conclusion. The next day Cromwell was more cheerful than had been usual with him of late; he loved polemics and to measure his rhetoric with others; yesterday's long argument with Sir Harry Vane had enlivened him; he looked forward to a resumption of the conference and to a final triumph for the Cause; he had recently communed much with himself, brooded and considered in his soul, and he was convinced that God had further work for him; part of that work he believed to be to settle the nation—and not by way of the Parliament.

That morning as he was at breakfast with Lambert and Harrison an abrupt end was put to his tranquillity and satisfaction.

News was brought that the Parliament had assembled early and were hurrying through Sir Harry Vane's bill.

The Lord-General sank at once into gloomy silence, while the other two soldiers heavily condemned the perfidy of the Parliament men.

'I will not believe it,' said Cromwell at last. 'Nay, I will not believe falsehood of Sir Harry Vane.'

'But maybe,' suggested Major-General Harrison, 'his followers have got beyond Sir Harry and done this thing despite him.'

'Nay,' returned the Lord-General. 'I believe it not.'

'You are too slow to move!' cried Harrison, with some heat. 'If it had not been for your hesitation there would have been no Parliament to defy the poor toilers in God's cause.'

The Lord-General pushed his tankard away from him.

'You are one,' he answered, 'who will not wait the Lord's leisure, but would hurry into that which afterwards honest men must repent.'

'You have waited the Lord's leisure too long,' said Harrison. 'Much delay is not good.'

'When the Lord speaks, I obey,' answered Cromwell, with some grimness; 'and then my actions are as swift as any man's, yea, even as thine, Major-General Harrison. I have given some poor testimony to that effect.'

'Meanwhile,' put in Lambert, 'the miserable remnant at Westminster are making their bill law—and where are we? Even made a mock of and slighted.'

As he spoke another messenger arrived, and close on his heels a third, to say that the Parliament were in very deed pushing through Sir Harry Vane's bill.

Then Cromwell rose.

'“Up, Lord, and help me, O my God,”' he said, '“for Thou smitest all mine enemies upon the cheek-bone—Thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly!” Now is the time—yea, even now.' He turned to Harrison. 'Come with me to Westminster and let us testify to God.'

He called for his hat; he wore his black coat and his grey worsted stockings and a plain neck-band.

As he was leaving Whitehall he ordered a guard of soldiers to accompany him, and marched down to Westminster with them behind him, as Charles had marched with his armed followers from the same Palace to the same Parliament eleven years before.

When they reached Westminster Hall he left the file of muskets in the outer room, and he and his two generals passed to their usual places in the Commons.

There were about sixty members present; at the silent

entrance of the three soldiers all looked round and about them, and some shifted in their places and whispered to their neighbours. 'I see Old Noll's red nose,' said one as Cromwell entered; 'we are like to have a tempest.'

But the Lord-General went quietly to his seat, as did his two companions; and the members, whatever trepidation they might feel, displayed none, but continued their debate, preparatory to passing Sir Harry Vane's bill.

Cromwell listened, his arms folded, his head bent on his breast; the sweet April sunshine filled the chamber with a pleasant haze in which the motes danced; Sir Harry Vane looked often at the Lord-General as if he would find an opportunity to excuse himself for his seeming breach of faith; indeed, his supporters had taken the matter out of his hands and forced the bill on, whether he would or no; but Cromwell sat glooming, and would not meet his eye.

The discussion proceeded, moderate, orderly; presently the Lord-General called to Major-General Harrison, who sat opposite to him on the other side of the House, to come to him.

'Methinks,' said Cromwell grimly, looking about him, 'this Parliament is rife for a dissolution—and that this is the time for doing it.'

Harrison, impetuous as he was, was startled by this; he might urge Cromwell to action, and blame his slowness, but when Cromwell was roused Harrison, like any other, was alarmed.

'Sir,' replied Harrison, lowering his voice (for their conversation was being observed with suspicion), 'this work is very great and dangerous, therefore, seriously consider of it, before you engage in it.'

'You say well,' replied Cromwell, and lapsed into moody silence again. Harrison took the seat next him, Lambert being near.

The members, though still outwardly tranquil, hastened the debate, and in a short while the question for passing the bill was about to be put.

Then Cromwell moved, and, leaning sideways to Harrison, touched him on the arm and said, 'This is the time; I must do it'; and then he suddenly stood up, taking off

his hat, and throwing out his right hand, he addressed the members with great passion.

‘What heart have ye for the public good,’ he cried—‘ye who support the corrupt interest of presbytery and that of the lawyers, who are the props of tyranny and oppression? This is a time of rebuke and chastening, but as the Lord liveth, we will have neither rebuke nor chastening from such as you!’

The members, swept into silence by the suddenness and violence of his speech, made no reply; all eyes were fixed on him as he stood on the floor of the House, his face flushed and his eyes fiery under the lowering brows.

‘What do ye care for but power?’ he flung at them, and his voice rang into the farthest corners of the Hall. ‘What do you care for but to perpetuate that power? As for that Act’—he pointed to where it lay ready to be passed—‘you have been forced to it, and I dare affirm that you never designed to observe it! I say your time has come; the Lord hath done with you—He has chosen more worthy instruments for the carrying on of His work—I say He will have no more paltering and fumbling with traps and toys of the ungodly!’

Here Sir Peter Wentworth got to his feet amid a hum of approbation.

‘This is the first time,’ he declared, red in the face, ‘that ever I heard such unbecoming language in Parliament—and it is the more horrid as it comes from the servant of the Parliament, and a servant whom Parliament hath so highly trusted—yea, and so highly obliged,’ he added, with meaning.

But he could get out no more. Cromwell stepped into the midst of the House and waved his hand contemptuously.

‘Come, come!’ he cried. ‘I will put an end to your prating!’

Then, stamping his feet and clapping on his hat as he saw several rise in a tumult to answer him, he said in a loud, stern voice, ‘You are no Parliament—I say you are no Parliament! I will put an end to your sitting!’

Then, while several tried to speak together and there was a confusion, the Lord-General bade the serjeant attending the House open the doors, which he did.

'Call them in,' said Cromwell; 'call them in.' And Lieutenant-Colonel Wolseley, with two files of muskets, entered the House and marched up the floor.

Then Sir Harry Vane, seeing the soldiers, stood up in his place and protested loudly—

'This is not honest! Yea, it is against morality and common honesty!'

Cromwell turned round and sorted him with his glance from the press.

'Oh, Sir Harry Vane! Sir Harry Vane!' he cried. 'The Lord deliver me from Sir Harry Vane!'

Then pointing out another member, he cried, 'There sits a drunkard,' and so railed at several separately, ending, 'Are these fit to govern God's poor people?'

The House was now in absolute disorder and confusion, but the Lord-General's voice rose above it all.

His angry eye lit on the mace.

'What shall we do with this bauble?' he asked, and added, 'There, take it away!'

Major-General Harrison went up to the Speaker.

'Sir,' he said, 'seeing things are reduced to this pass, it is no longer convenient for you to remain here.'

The Speaker answered, 'Unless you force me, I will not come down.'

'Sir,' replied Harrison, 'I will lend you my hand.'

And, so saying, he took hold of him and brought him down.

Then Cromwell turned again to the Members who were all coming from their places.

'It is you who have forced me to do this!' he cried, with passion, 'for I have sought the Lord day and night that He would rather slay me than put me on the doing of this work!'

Turning to Lieutenant-General Wolseley, who commanded the muskets, he ordered him to clear the House, which was done, the Members forlornly departing under the command of the soldiers, Cromwell sternly watching the while.

And when the benches were all empty he went to the clerk, who was blankly and in a bewildered way holding

Sir Harry Vane's bill, and, snatching it from his hands, put it under his cloak.

Then ordering the doors to be locked, he went back to Whitehall with Lambert and Harrison. But the day's work was not yet complete; he had barely reached his headquarters before Lieutenant-General Wolseley came up to say that the late Parliament's creation, the Council of State, were sitting as usual in the Painted Chamber.

'Say you so?' replied Cromwell, and he turned back to Whitehall as he had turned back to Hampton when he heard of Charles' double dealing.

Lambert and Harrison accompanied him, and the three swept into the Painted Chamber with little ceremony.

John Bradshaw, the late King's judge, was in the chair; he faced the Lord-General as he had faced the unhappy King, with unshaken dignity and calm.

Cromwell was now composed; but he eyed the Councillors fiercely as he walked up the room.

'If you meet here as private persons,' he said, 'you shall not be disturbed, but if you meet as a Council of State, this is no place for you,' his harsh voice became ominous. 'Since you cannot but know what has just been done in the House, take notice that the Parliament is dissolved.'

The Latin Secretary raised his tired blue eyes with something of admiration as well as keen interest in their glance, but Bradshaw replied with unmoved sternness, eyeing Cromwell with a directness as uncompromising as Cromwell eyed him.

'Sir,' he said, 'we have heard what you did in the House, and before many hours all England will hear it. But, sir, you are mistaken to think that the Parliament is dissolved—for no power under Heaven can dissolve them but they themselves, therefore take *you* notice of that.'

'Ha, Mr. Bradshaw,' returned the Lord-General, 'you may talk and talk, but I say that the Lord has done with you and with these others about you. I know that you are a person of an upright carriage, who has notably appeared for God and for the public good, but I say that your time is over—other means are to be used now, yea, other means!'

'The means of force and violence,' replied John Bradshaw calmly, 'and to them we must submit. I do not deny that, but your right we shall always deny, therefore remember it——'

'You are no longer a Council of State,' said Cromwell, 'and none shall any longer give heed to you. Go about your several businesses.'

Bradshaw came down from his place.

'And with us goes the Commonwealth,' he returned. 'What will you put in place of it?'

'The Lord shall show in His leisure,' said Cromwell sternly, and went from the Painted Chamber with Lambert and Harrison after him.

And so it was over; the Parliament had followed the King; the last remnant and pretence of a constitution had been swept away, and a sudden military revolution had placed the army at the head of the nation, their leader thereby becoming the greatest man in England.

For, the King gone, the Parliament broken, who was there left for any man to look to save he who had swept away both King and Parliament and now stamped angrily out of Westminster Hall?

Even Harrison had been taken by surprise; he was enthusiastic, as he foresaw an uninterrupted reign of God's chosen, those military saints who were sacred and purified by their fights for the Lord, but he was also a little bewildered as to the course future events must take.

Lambert merely said, 'This is a difficult business and requires careful handling.'

But Cromwell himself was openly exalted and uplifted; his passion of anger gave way to a passion of spiritual enthusiasm.

'This hath been a call from the Lord!' he cried, as the three walked back to Whitehall. 'Yea, a direct call! Own it, for it hath been unprojected, and is marvellous! This morning did we know of this thing? Nay, and now it is done! And this hath been the way the Lord hath dwelt with us from the first. He hath kept things from our eyes all along so that we have never seen His dispensations beforehand!'

'Truly,' replied Harrison, 'He hath marvellously

witnessed for us, and thou hast been as Joshua who scattered the enemies of the Lord at the waters of Merom, and chased them even into the valley of Mizpeh, and burnt Hazor with fire.’

‘The Edomites, the Ammonites, and the Moabites are scattered,’ said Lambert, ‘but who is now to reign in Israel?’

‘We whom God hath called,’ replied Cromwell.

And so they came to the headquarters of the army at Whitehall, the palace of the late King; and the second revolution was complete.

CHAPTER IV

‘THE NEW ORDER’

THE rule of the Lord-General and his council of officers, governing in a form parliamentary, called ‘the Little Parliament’ was a failure complete and absolute.

Soldiers could not do the work of lawyers, nor the veterans of Naseby, Preston, Dunbar, and Worcester rule England as well as they had defended her. Such measures as they carried were totally against the principles and policy of their leader, who passed from rapt enthusiasm to sad disillusion, and finally to gloomy anger again; the military saints, chosen of the Lord as they were, and the very cream of the elect, could not govern England.

In December 1653, after many consultations with his councils, Cromwell, who hesitated to break up another Parliament by force, persuaded the officers to hand back their powers to him from whom they had received them.

The soldiers, though fanatic, narrow, and intolerant, were neither self-seeking nor unreasonable; they saw that they were unable to govern the country, and that there was only one man who could undertake the task that had been too much for them.

Whether he had the courage, the daring, the firmness to seize this position, to step to the front and take the command so completely, to take upon himself the burden of rule in the present state of the country, after so many attempts at government had failed, was yet to be seen.

He had hitherto shown no personal ambition and no desire to thrust himself forward, his manner being rather to keep himself in the background and wait for God to bid him act.

The moment was serious, perilous, even awful; the Members of the last Parliament and the officers met constantly in prayer; conferences, meetings between all the able men available, were frequent; the people, sternly and austere ruled for the last three years, with the Puritans triumphant and the Cavaliers utterly silenced and suppressed, waited in a quietude that concealed an intense excitement.

On Wednesday, the 15th of December, the Lord-General rode from one of these meetings to his home, now at Hampton Court. He arrived there bitten with the cold and covered with fine snow. He went straight to the fire in the room which his family used to dine in, and flung himself with the weariness of one spent in mind and body into the great wicker chair with arms and red cushions that he commonly used.

The noble, pleasant room was empty save for Elisabeth, his daughter (the Claypoles had a suite of apartments at Hampton Palace), and her youngest child, who was asleep on her knee. He had not noticed her at first, so quietly was she withdrawn into the shadows, and her low, pleased exclamation, 'My father!' gave him a little start.

'Betty!' he impetuously flung out his hand to her; she softly laid the sleeping boy on the velvet couch from which she had risen, and, coming to his side, knelt beside him, and slipped her hand inside his.

He gazed with affectionate pleasure at her charming face, bright and delicate, sensitive and resolute, lifted to his, the brown, waving hair, the expressive blue eyes, the mouth a little wistful, the chin a little proud, the whole infinitely dear and loving.

'What has happened to-day?' she asked gently.

The look of heaviness her greeting had lightened returned to his countenance; he lifted his head and stared into the mellow flames that sprang from the great logs between the brass and irons.

'Betty, it hath come,' he said; 'it is to be laid on

me, the burden, yea, the whole burden. Mine was the responsibility,' his rough voice rose a little. 'I put down the King, I broke the Parliament—I set up the officers who failed (the more blame to me)—and now it is I who must guide the State.'

'Thou?' murmured Elisabeth.

'Who else?' he continued moodily, 'who else? It is a call from God and the people, and no man could ask for more. Yea, I know the Lord hath called me as He called me ten years ago from St. Ives—this is thy work—get thou up and do it!'

'Thou—wilt thou be King?' asked Elisabeth, dropping his hand with a shiver of fear.

'Even so,' he replied sombrely; 'but not with the name of a thing so hated shall I be called. Some time ago this came to me as the thing to do—a flash out of a cloud—then darkness came again; but now it is before me, very clearly, that I must be the Governor of England.'

'It is a high calling and an awful place to hold,' said his daughter.

'And I am sick in the body, often and often tired in the soul. Thou dost know,' he added, with a kind of passion, 'how very, very willing I was to retire after Worcester fight; often upon riding the rough ways in Scotland, often when sick in Ireland, have I dreamt to come back to a meek, sweet retirement, but it was not to be. God sought me out again and bid me go forward. And now there is this come upon me. Betty, I shall soon be fifty-five years old. I feel myself, in many ways, old. But there is this work to do. And it is for England. Yet how shall I prevail where these upright and wise ones failed? For they strove earnestly, yet God would not have them. Will He forsake me also? "Oh, that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest!" Lo, then would I wander far off and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest!'

And his head drooped on his breast as if he was discouraged.

Elisabeth took his inert hand again between her fresh, warm palms.

‘Why should you fear a cold success in this great venture?’ she asked. ‘Truly it is a great and awful thing to take a king’s place, but shall not the Lord still support you as hitherto, and bless you with notable victories?’

Cromwell, still staring into the fire, answered slowly.

‘I have some sparks of the light of His countenance, which keeps me alive—yet I see ahead difficulties greater than any I have yet met. What are charges in the field compared to factions in the State? I say the saints failed, and shall not I fail? Will not men say to me, as the Hebrew said to Moses—“Who made thee a Prince and a judge over us? Intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian?”’

Elisabeth shuddered.

‘Ay, I killed the Egyptian,’ continued Cromwell, glooming, ‘but there are many more out of Egypt ready to take his place, ready to confound us, yea, there are plenty of diabolic persons abroad, ready to set snares for the godly, even the devil and all his angels are lying in wait to thwart this England which the Lord hath elected for His own!’

‘But thou canst meet and conquer them, if it be in the power of any man to do so,’ returned Elisabeth simply. ‘Again I say it is a high and fearful thing that thou must undertake, but I know that in all things thou wilt walk according to the Gospel.’

The Lord-General turned to look at her as she knelt beside him in her rosy gown with the firelight glowing over her, her face upturned, and her hands clasped on the arm of his chair—a sweet comforter truly, in her seriousness and loving encouragement, in her eager belief in him and rapt piety.

‘That is not how many will speak of me, Betty,’ he said, with a sad tenderness. ‘Rather will they call me usurper and traitor, and say that I have put down others for carnal ambition. Many hard and contemptuous things will be said of me, Betty.’

‘I know,’ she answered bravely, ‘but need *we* care?’

As she spoke, a third came down the shadowy room, and joined them—Elisabeth Cromwell.

The Lord-General rose and went up to her.

'You are tired!' she cried, noting that before all, and she caught his arms and peered up into his face tenderly through the dim light.

'Mother,' said Mrs. Claypole, rising from beside the empty chair—'the new orders are decided upon to-day——'

'Ah!' cried Cromwell's wife, 'and thou?'

'My dear, my best,' he said, 'we must live at Whitehall now——'

'The king's palace?' she exclaimed, recoiling a little.

'Yea,' he answered gently, 'for I am called to be the new Governor of this country.'

'Why, that is a fearful thing!' she said, with a half-terrified laugh. 'Thou wilt never more be safe, nor I at peace!'

She let go her hold on his sleeves and moved to the fire.

'I was happier before it all began,' she said abruptly; 'this startles me.' She gave again that piteous laugh, which was more like a sob. 'I am too old to learn to be a Prince's lady,' she said.

And she glanced in the mirror above the mantelpiece, looking at her grey hair and meek face.

'I would sooner not put this up in Whitehall for all the world to gape at!' she said.

'Ah, mother!' cried Betty Claypole, and embraced her and kissed her hand.

'Did you not expect this?' asked the Lord-General mournfully. 'I did so—because,' he added, with great simplicity, 'I saw no other fitted for the place.'

'There is no other,' said his daughter. 'He is one and only—is it not so, mother? And thou art one and only, too, dear, and wilt shine in Whitehall far higher than the French Queen.'

The Lord-General turned with a little smile to both of them.

'By now you should be used to living in a palace,' he said.

'What will they say of us?' asked Elisabeth Cromwell, still troubled. 'They will say that we have put ourselves up in the King's place.'

‘There is no king,’ interrupted Cromwell firmly. ‘And as for the place I undertake to fill, the whole people have called me to it, yea, the whole people.’

He repeated this statement as if to persuade and convince himself; he well knew that his authority came from a very few of the people, mainly from the army leaders, and that his election was not the result of a general demand on the part of the nation; only the minority had hailed him, the majority remained as always, passive, almost indifferent—or fiercely hostile.

He might be going to rule for the people’s sake, purely, but he was not going to rule by their wish. He felt this a weakness in his case and strove to cover it, even to deceive himself in it; a general election, a genuine appeal to the country, might have resulted in bringing in the second Charles Stewart, and for the sake of the cause he had not dared risk it. Sir Bulstrode Whitelocke, who in many ways represented the average Englishman, had pressed Cromwell to call in Charles after the crisis of a year ago, and no one knew better than the Lord-General that the three islands seethed with royalist plots and the restless intrigues of various fanatical sects. No one knew better than he, either, what a target for hatred and rage he would be, what undying fury he would arouse, how many and implacable his enemies would become.

His call might be from God, it certainly was not from the people of England.

Elisabeth Claypole knew something of all this, and to her there was something piteous in the strong man’s attempt to belittle his difficulties and disguise the narrow basis on which his authority rested.

Elisabeth Cromwell broke the thoughtful silence.

‘And thou wilt be Governor of England!’ she said. ‘Scarcely can I believe it.’

She voiced the incredulity of many; yet the thing was done.

On the following Friday, His Excellency the Lord-General of the Forces became His Highness the Lord-Protector of England, and was installed in that office with all ancient ceremonial, formerly used by kings, and kings alone.

There was an installation in the Chancery Court, Westminster Hall, His Highness appearing in a richer dress than he had ever worn before, even at his son's wedding—rich velvet, all black, with a band of gold round his hat, a fine sword, and sword band.

So he went in procession from Whitehall and back again, attended by the Lord Mayor, the judges, and other dignitaries, in robe of state, outriders, running footmen, guards of soldiers, and the usual shouting crowd, half-awed, half-jeering, and wholly curious, some wishing confusion to red-nosed Noll and some thanking the Lord that He had sent a gracious saint to reign over them.

The serjeants with their maces, the heralds in gold and scarlet, proclaimed, at Old Exchange, at Palace Yard, and in other places, Oliver Cromwell Lord-Protector, with the same dignity, and ceremony, and shouting as Charles Stewart had been proclaimed King. So a change so tremendous was accomplished with such little outward difference.

The new ruler had given his oath of fidelity to the new Constitution (an instrument drawn up in four days by the officers, with Lambert at their head) and had received the great seal and sword of State. By the afternoon all was over, and the man who little more than ten years ago had been a gentleman farmer was now sole ruler, dictator, and symbol of one of the greatest nations in Europe and foremost champion of the Reformed Religion. . . .

Elisabeth Claypole (Lady Elisabeth now) slept that next spring in Whitehall; the first night she lay on a bed with blue satin curtains brought by Henriette Marie from France, and not sold with the King's other effects by reason of the fine workmanship of the needlework on them. Elisabeth, who had less than any of her family the stern belief in fatalism, which was the central doctrine of their austere and heroic creed, and less blind reliance on the justice of the Puritan cause, felt a faint horror and a regretful remorse at lying among these splendours when the woman to whom they had belonged (to whom they still belonged, Elisabeth thought) dwelt in poverty and loneliness, unfortunate as Queen and wife.

That first night she dreamt dismal things, and woke up in the dark, oppressed with confused remembrances of the excitement of the day.

And with other remembrances, more awful ; often had she heard an account of the execution of the King and listened with horrified and reluctant ears.

Now, as she sat up in the great bed, shivering in the winter night, she pictured, all too clearly, the late King as he had been described to her—the slender figure in the pale blue silk vest, with the George on the breast, and the hair gathered up under a white satin cap.

She thought that she saw him glimmer across the dark, looking down at his feet—he wore the wide shoes with silk roses, which had gone out of fashion since his death—and then at her, smiling bitterly.

He came, without moving his limbs, gliding to the bed, passed it, rose up a man's height from the floor, and disappeared in a shaft of shaking light.

'We are intruders here !' said Elisabeth, cold to the heart. She got out of bed (her husband was still asleep ; she could hear his even breathing) and stood shivering in the keen air.

A chill like a presage of death crept through her veins ; the whole place seemed to exhale an air of hate and misery.

So strong was this feeling that she fumbled for a gown in the dark, and stole to the next chamber to look at her infant son.

The moonlight was in his room, and she saw him sleeping peacefully beside his nurse. Elisabeth crept back, dreading lest she should conjure up another awful image of the late King.

'I am not going to be happy here,' she kept saying to herself. 'I am not going to be happy here.'

The next day she did not leave her bed, and before long it was known that the Protector's favourite daughter was stricken with a lingering, nameless illness.

CHAPTER V

HIS HIGHNESS

'WAS England ever in a better way?' demanded the Lord-Protector. 'Even under Elisabeth of famous memory (for so we may truly call her) was this country more quiet at home, more respected abroad? Nay, there is no malignant in the land can say it——'

'Surely Your Highness hath no need to make any defence to us,' said the Lord Lambert, one of his military council. Some number of them and other dignitaries were gathered in his apartment at Whitehall, listening to him.

His Highness, who had hitherto been pacing restlessly up and down the room, here came to a pause before the table at which the officers and councillors sat.

'I have need to defend myself before all men,' he exclaimed vehemently, 'for on every hand am I decried and blamed! I speak not of plots against my life and such little matters—the work of a few diabolic persons in the pay of Charles Stewart—but of the great discontent of the Prelatists, of the rage of the Papists, of the intolerance of all—yea, even of the sharpness and bitterness of many of God's people who go about saying that the ways of Zion are filled with money, that their gold is dim, and that there is a sharp wind abroad, but not to cleanse the land.'

None of the officers offering to speak, Cromwell continued, still in an impassioned manner—

'Whoever speaks so is wrong! God put me here. My authority is from Him—I will come down for none of them.'

He went to the window embrasure and stood there, with his back to the light, his hat pulled over his brows, his arms folded on his breast, gazing at his councillors and friends.

The Protectorship had lasted over a year, and Cromwell was now as absolute as ever Stewart had dared to be.

His first Parliament had gone the way of the last of King Charles'; the members presuming to question the Instrument by which Cromwell had been elected, His

Highness had again resorted to the file of soldiers with loaded snaphances, and, gathering the expelled members in the Painted Chamber, had made them swear fealty to the Instrument and to himself before he permitted them to return to their places.

The immovable Bradshaw, Sir Arthur Haselrig, one of the famous five members, and some others refused the oath ; the rest took it and went back.

But so impossible was it to combine a military autocracy with the ancient methods of civil government, so impossible for soldiers and lawyers to work together, that the Parliament again displeased His Highness by revising the Instrument into a constitution which His Highness could not accept.

On the earliest opportunity he dismissed them, and had since ruled entirely on his own authority with such help as he might get from the Council of officers.

So when all the ancient landmarks had been carried away, the power of the sword remained standing and the army and their general ruled England ; it was a strange ending to the long, earnest, and bloody struggle, an ending neither Pym nor Hampden had ever foreseen, nor Cromwell himself, when the Parliament he was afterwards to break had sent him down to Cambridge to raise a troop for the defiance of the King.

In ruling without a Parliament he was doing what Strafford and Charles had perished for attempting, in keeping a huge standing army (it was now twice the number named in the Instrument) he was doing what no king of England had been permitted to do ; he had, in fact, the power at which Charles had aimed, and he had what Charles had never been able to attain—the armed force to maintain him in that power.

When he dealt with the Parliament he had used the methods Strafford would have used had he dared, and he was ruling now with the absolutism which Strafford had always passionately hoped would one day belong to his master.

But what had not been possible to a descendant of many kings, with all tradition behind him, had been achieved easily enough by a soldier produced by a revolu-

tion, who had nothing to rely on but the gifts within himself.

Cromwell was too clear-sighted not to discern the illogical position he was occupying, but it did not disturb him, nor did he find it very wonderful ; his fatalism (which his enemies termed opportunism) accepted without question all that the Lord should be pleased to send ; his enthusiasm for the cause of liberty disguised, even from himself, the arbitrary nature of his authority, and the victorious soldier, who had fought God's battles from Naseby to Worcester, was not to be frightened from the position he held by any malignant talk of his unlawful right. Nor was the wise patriot and ardent statesman to be argued from the point of vantage from whence he could do the best for England.

But the plots, agitations, upheavals, intolerances, and violences about him, even among his own one-time friends (some of whom, including the lofty-minded Vane, were in the Tower), did shake and trouble him. These, more than anything, thwarted him in his honest and strenuous attempt to set up an orderly government on the ruins left by the violence of war and the wreckage of social upheaval.

'I will not have intolerance!' he broke out now, suddenly at his Council. 'I say I will not have it—let every man who is not a Prelatist or a Papist—who doth not preach licentious doctrines in the name of Christ—let him worship in peace!'

'In this way many damnable heresies will creep into the land,' answered one of the officers.

'I would rather,' cried His Highness, 'permit Mahometanism in the land than have one of God's people persecuted!'

His Council remained silent ; not one of these men agreed with him, and it was a notable tribute to the respect and affection they had for him that none of them raised a voice in dissent.

He felt, however, their opposition, as indeed he felt the opposition of the entire nation to this dearest of his ideals—toleration.

It seemed as if men never would agree to leave their neighbour in peace on the question of religious belief ; and

the extraordinary bitterness of the feeling between the various sects was more and more vexing to Cromwell, who had always held tolerance as a matter of principle, and now, as he advanced more and more in greatness and power, recognized it as being a necessary element of wise government at home and useful alliances abroad.

'God,' he continued, driving home his point with a certain labour, as if he struggled to put into words what no words would convey, 'hath elected England—He hath made us the instruments of some work of His. He wishes us to go forward—to fight heresies and Antichrist—but also He wisheth us to remain united in brotherly love, not to be too nice and strict about the religion of the man next us, so long as he be working clearly in due fear of Him—were we not all kinds in the army? Did any fight the worse for being an Anabaptist? Nay, I do not think so. God hath need of all of us who love Him.'

General Lambert answered—

'This is very well here, among sober men, but how shall Your Highness get such a doctrine accepted among the general?'

'Yea,' said the Lord-Protector gloomily. 'Truly the fools trouble me more than the knaves—most of all do the lukewarm vex me, for nought will bring them to any reason—give me a Saul sooner than a Gallio!'

'Sir,' replied one of the officers, 'there are Sauls, and plenty too, and maybe the Lord calleth us to combat these sooner than to smooth over heresies and live peaceably with those who are little better than the heathen and the infidel.'

Cromwell groaned.

'There is much to do,' he answered, 'I say there is much to do—yea, serious and mighty things; and shall we stop on the way to argue upon trivial matters?'

'Trivial matters!' echoed several voices at once.

The Lord-Protector flashed upon them—

'Yea, so I say! Study how a man may serve the State, not how he may be persuaded from his proper beliefs—this is enough for any man. "With my whole heart have I sought Thee—O let me not go wrong out of Thy commandments!"—he who can say that from his heart, leave him in peace. Even these poor people the Quakers—what

harm is there in them that they should be so roughly used ? What hath God said ?—" I have loved thee with an everlasting love—with loving kindness have I drawn thee ! " Shall we, too, not strive for a little of this kindness ? What have we not had to contend with of late ? A Parliament that was but a clog and a hindrance, rebellions such as that at Salisbury, godly men such as Major-General Harrison led astray, rising of Anabaptists—all manner of trouble and confusion—and shall we add to it by persecuting those who differ from us in small matters of doctrine ? '

The Council remained silent ; the Keepers of the Great Seal glanced at one another. These men were not in dread of His Highness as his Parliament had been ; they were not his creation to be scattered at his will—nay, he was rather their creation—yet they knew that when it came to a struggle he always prevailed, gently or roughly, directly or indirectly, and they were aware of his whirlwind resolutions and believed that if occasion arose they, too, might be smitten and cast aside, even though they were the very foundations on which his power stood.

The Protector, eyeing them keenly, was silent too.

The Master of the Rolls, Lenthall (the Speaker whom Harrison had helped from the chair when Cromwell had dismissed the remnant of Charles' last Parliament), propping his grim face on his thin hand, asked His Highness what he was discontented with.

' Surely,' he said, with some austerity, ' the work of Christ is being accomplished in England ? Abroad we have good respect—I think General Blake hath made the name of English respected on the seas—all Europe hath recognized this Commonwealth. Why is Your Highness so vexed and troubled ? '

He spoke with some sternness, for he believed, in common with many of his colleagues, that the Protector aimed at an even greater personal power, and to make himself king in name as he was in fact—an ambition which was intensely displeasing to the army and to their leaders, nearly all of whom were staunch Republicans.

' I am vexed and troubled because there is so much confusion and littleness at home,' replied Cromwell. ' There is more lamenting over the putting down of cock-

fighting, play-acting, and horse-racing, gambling, and such lewd sports than ever I heard over the loss of any good thing. There are plots and confusions manifold, and the Lord hath veiled the future from me, therefore I am vexed and troubled. Yet,' he added, with a change of voice and a bright flash in his eyes, 'I am not discouraged nor disheartened—ye must not so misread me—"in the daytime also He led them with a cloud, and in the night with a pillar of fire"—so it hath always been with me—do not think that that hath ever failed me.'

No man had any speech with which to answer him, and the little assembly broke up with the usual courtesies. Only Lambert said as he was leaving: "'He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.'"

When they had all gone His Highness went to the table where they had been sitting, and sat down in his great chair of honour and dropped his head on his breast.

For some while he sat so, his head sinking lower, his hands clasped on his knees; then he was aroused by the gentle opening of the door, and Elisabeth Claypole came softly into the Council Chamber.

'Forgive me,' she said. 'I did see that the others had gone, and, knowing that you must be alone, I feared you had fallen into sad thoughts.' She approached him. 'It is not well, my father—nay, it is not well—that you should sit alone with melancholy thoughts.'

She sank into the chair that the stern Lambert had just left; the dark wood and leather now framed a very different picture from that the austere soldier had made.

Long ill-health, which physicians could not cure, and intervals of lingering illness, which physicians could not ease, had robbed Elisabeth Claypole of much of her vivacity and much of her fresh comeliness, but she still remained, despite her languor, her paleness, a certain sadness caused by constant pain, a creature choice and rare, and, despite all, cheerful and courageous. As the Lord-Protector lifted his tired eyes to gaze at her dear face he saw in her youthful features a sudden startling likeness to his mother, who had died, still valiant and serene, a few months after she had moved into the King's palace.

This curious resemblance between one dead, so full of

ars, and one young and living gave him a feeling of
irrid presage ; he rose abruptly.

‘ Betty, I wish you would get well,’ he said.

She smiled faintly.

‘ That is what Bridget says,’ she answered (Bridget
eton was Bridget Fleetwood now, the wife of one of her
ther’s most honoured generals. Mary and Frances were
ll to wed, and great matches were foretold for them) ;
ut you must not think so much of me—I shall soon be
ell enough.’

Her father gazed at her, yearning over that lost bright-
ss which he had condemned once as evidence of a carnal
ind ; her grey gown, her modest laces, her smooth ringlets
all were plain enough now ; though her father had put on
eat state and lived almost with the ceremonial of a king,
e Lady Elisabeth had no longer any heart for pretty
unities.

‘ Methinks,’ said Cromwell bluntly, ‘ thou art not happy
hen thou art at Whitehall.’

‘ I love Hampton better,’ she replied evasively.

It was not difficult for him to divine what her thoughts
ere—what they always had been.

‘ Thou dost think thy father liveth in another man’s
ouse by living in the King’s palace,’ he said, with
himsical tenderness.

‘ No, no,’ she answered, with an effort ; ‘ but it re-
indeth me of old, unhappy times—of all the blood that
as shed—of the King himself (poor, wretched King)——’

Cromwell interrupted vehemently.

‘ He did not die for nothing, neither he nor the others—
hat judgment on the tyrant was the fruit and crown of
ll our efforts and prepared the way for such of Christ’s
ork as we have been able to do since. Betty’—he
urned to his daughter with the same half-anxious, half-
roud air of defence with which he had turned to his
ouncil a little before—‘ is not this country better at
ome and abroad than it was under the late King ? ’

‘ All bear witness to that,’ she replied quickly ; ‘ and
hat is the reason why you should be more uprised in
pirits, sir.’

‘ I have much to overcome,’ he answered.

'What hath the Lord said?' rejoined the Lady Elisabeth—'With him that overcometh will I share My throne.''

'Dear one, thy rebuke is well,' answered His Highness gently, 'and do not doubt that I shall go forward to the end. But at present there are some things hard to bear—mostly the estrangement from some Christians of my acquaintance. I did never think to be parted from Major-General Harrison and John Bradshaw, those godly men. Albeit I have tried my best to remain with them, and I hope yet to win Major-General Harrison.'

'He is hard, father—he is hard and fierce,' replied Elisabeth Claypole. 'He was cruel to many poor men—I have heard notable talk of it——'

'Thou art too pitiful,' said Cromwell, 'and judge as a woman. There is no man among us—not thy brother Henry, not Lambert, nor Dishowe, nor my son Fleetwood, a finer soldier or a truer Christian than Thomas Harrison.'

'I do not like him,' insisted the Lady Elisabeth, with a sparkle of her former spirit. 'Methinks he smells of his father's trade, and it is credibly believed that he hath plotted against you with the Anabaptists—Richard told me as much.'

'As to that I will demand an answer of these charges from him,' returned Cromwell gloomily. 'Believe me that I love him.'

For answer and comfort she rose and went up to him; as she took him lovingly by the upper arm she started. She felt something hard beneath the rich black velvet which he wore.

'You have armour on!' she murmured.

'Since young Major Gerrard set the precedent there have been many ready to follow his example,' replied His Highness. 'And in this way I would not die—nay, I would not die shot like a beast.'

'O Christ, preserve us all!' cried Lady Elisabeth, and fell weeping over the heart that her father had to guard with a steel corselet from the assassin's bullet or knife.

He put his arm round her as if she had been a child (so, indeed, she still seemed to him); and the thoughts

of both went back to the happy home in St. Ives, before they had known sickness or death among them, when she had not gone in silk nor he in secret armour, when they had not known the perils of great positions nor the magnificence of king's palaces.

CHAPTER VI

MAJOR-GENERAL HARRISON

MAJOR-GENERAL HARRISON, in grim retirement, sternly rejected the Lord-Protector's half-wistful attempts to win him, and even refused to come to Whitehall as a friend and dine or sup with the Cromwell family.

His Highness, however piqued or hurt he might be in secret, refused to allow any persecution of his old comrade-in-arms, though Harrison was becoming daily more involved with the Anabaptists and that peculiar section of enthusiasts who were styled Fifth Monarchy Men, because they believed that the four kingdoms foretold by St. John had come to pass, and that the kingdom now approaching was the fifth, that of Christ.

His Highness was lenient with them as with other fanatics: it was in his nature to be tolerant and to prefer any form of enthusiasm to lukewarmness. He was gentle with the Quakers, and listened patiently to George Fox's mystic denunciations of him. 'I am sure that thou and I should be good friends did we but know each other,' had been his parting words. He interceded, though vainly, for the poor, half-crazed Naylor, who had allowed his followers to salute him as the Messiah and had been sentenced by Parliament to brandings, whippings, and pillories that meant a hideous death.

But though the Lord-Protector was merciful he was also strong, as had been abundantly proved.

When fanaticism became insubordination and the cause of religious liberty cloaked mutiny and revolt, when, in brief, things mystic and intangible interfered with things

very practical and tangible, His Highness struck once and for ever.

He raised no objection to men finding in the pages of the Revelations a doctrine comfortable to themselves ; but if they used such doctrines as a pretext for rebellion, he knew how to hold them down with a firm hand.

Therefore, though he argued sweetly and meekly with Thomas Harrison, he had that redoubtable saint closely under his observation, as he also watched Harry Vane and Bradshaw and Haselrig and other of his one-time friends.

His Highness was busy in these days, full of high business with France and Spain and the Netherlands as well as with this business of keeping order at home ; for Oliver Cromwell, who had always been a great man, was now a great Prince, and England had become of more importance in Europe than she had been since the royal Elisabeth or the royal Harry v.

It was the Lord's doing, said His Highness, the Lord who had elected the English as His chosen people. A league of the Protestant nations in one alliance was foremost of the Lord-Protector's deeply cherished schemes ; at present it seemed far from consummation : more practical matters occupied His Highness. With Blake on the seas and himself at home, England was powerful and vigorous ; outwardly she was serene as she was glorious, but none knew better than Cromwell himself how beneath this serenity raged faction, discontent, and confusion, and how uncertain the tenure of this glory was—merely the tenure of his own life.

Soon after a certain complicated and perilous plot against that life had been discovered and crushed, Cromwell received, among other news equally disturbing (for troubles did not lack in England this turbulent spring), an account, well attested, of Major-General Harrison's treasonous dealings with the Fifth Monarchy Men and of a widespread plot to seduce the army from its allegiance.

An Anabaptist preacher had held forth boldly. ' Wilt thou have Christ or Cromwell ? ' he had asked. In daring and in defiance these enthusiasts were getting beyond all common prudence.

His Highness sent for Major-General Harrison, not in the terms of friendship now, but as a Prince summoning a subject.

Major-General Harrison came, grimly but serenely, and was ushered through all the state the Protector kept, for, though simple with his family and friends, to the outer world he held as much show as any monarch, into the presence of His Highness, who waited him in a very rich chamber that still contained some of the late King's pictures and hangings and carpets.

The Lord-Protector was standing facing the door. He looked less than his years, and his expression and pose were both of extraordinary vigour; he wore brown velvet galloned with gold and a great falling collar of lace; his hair was now as grey as Charles' when he was brought prisoner to Hampton Court; but his mournful, resolute face showed no sign of age or feebleness.

Thomas Harrison was unbooted, for he had come by water; his attire was the very extreme of severe simplicity, and his dark countenance was pale and stern.

He took off his high-crowned hat as he came into the Protector's presence and flung it, with his cloak, across a chair; he made no reverence and eyed His Highness with calm hostility.

This cold look from one who had been his ancient friend, who had shared with him so many hopes, enthusiasms, toils, and victories, smote the Protector to the heart. He had been prepared for this enmity; but now that he was actually in the presence of his former companion-at-arms, the sight of the figure he had so often seen foremost in the field of battle, fighting for the Lord, and the face which he had seen so often fired by an exaltation kindred to his own, overwhelmed him with a tender sadness and the tears sprang into his eyes.

'Thomas Harrison,' he cried, 'I did not think that we should meet thus!'

'Nor I,' replied the other sombrely. 'Sir, have your say with me and let me go—for I have nobler work to do than a vain waiting on men in palaces.'

His Highness slightly flushed.

'I see what rankles in thy mind,' he replied. 'Yet I

did think that, whatever the general might say, a man such as thou wouldst have believed the best, not the worst. Nay,' he added more warmly, 'why shouldst thou think so meanly of me? Looking into thy own heart, thou knowest thy motives and principles pure—hast thou not the generosity to credit that I might look into my heart and say the same?'

Major-General Harrison gazed at him unmoved.

'Wherefore this defence?' he asked. 'I have accused you of nothing.'

'Not in words,' replied the Lord-Protector, 'but by thy whole conduct and manner.'

'Neither need trouble thee,' said the soldier calmly, speaking with more mildness and adopting the form of speech both more respectful and more affectionate, 'since thou needst not see me save by thy own wish.'

'It was needful that I should see thee,' returned His Highness, 'it was very needful. Hard things are said of thee—yea, difficult and curious things.'

He walked about the room, looking at the floor, his arms folded behind him, then stopped before Harrison, who remained a few paces from the door standing by the chair on which were his hat and cloak.

'Thou hast meddled with Anabaptists and these mistaken people called Fifth Monarchy Men,' he said abruptly.

A grim smile flashed over Harrison's face.

'Art thou become a persecutor and a watcher over men's consciences and a spy on their actions?' he asked.

'Nay,' replied His Highness, grimly too, 'thou knowest well enough if I am tolerant or no, Thomas Harrison; thou knowest me very well, even to the roots of my heart. But now I am Governor of England, and over England I shall watch.'

'Thou art,' said the undaunted Republican, 'a tyrant.'

'I am a ruler by charter of God and the People,' said Cromwell. 'It is well known in this nation and in all the world'—he lifted his head with great dignity—'whether I am a tyrant or no. But I will admit this much, I have as much power and authority as many a bad king. Take that along with thee.'

'I take along with me,' returned Harrison, 'that thou

art a tyrant ; and though it hath pleased God, in His mysterious decrees, to place thee where thou art, I know that He hath done it to bring a further rebuke and chastening upon us before the coming of His kingdom and for thy destruction. There is a wind abroad over the land, but one which neither purifies nor cools—the presence of God is not with thee nor with those under thee.’

‘This is hardly said,’ answered the Lord-Protector sadly. ‘Ah, thou hast gone so far with me—canst thou not go a little further ? Together we fought, together we judged that wicked man, Charles Stewart——’

Harrison interrupted.

‘Then thou wast acting as God directed—but lately thou hast acted as if a bad angel possessed thee. The true saints who fought with thee then could not fight with thee now, Lord Cromwell. A poor few we are—nay, a pitiful remnant, but we believe that before long it will be made known from Heaven that we are right, although it hath seemed good to Him to suffer this turn to come upon us—so that we are a forsaken few.’

‘Nay, not forsaken !’ cried His Highness, much agitated. ‘Is it not for thee, and such as thee, that this Government exists ?’

‘I know not,’ replied Harrison coldly. ‘Methought that it existed for itself, as all governments do.’

‘Truly,’ cried the Lord-Protector, with rising anger, ‘they who call thee hard have reason—nay, thou art more, thou art unjust.’

‘Unjust !’ repeated Harrison, with more emotion than he had so far shown. ‘Is thy memory so feeble or thy heart so false as not to recall the old days, the bright morning of our hopes and triumphs ?’

He came a step nearer, holding out his hands and speaking vehemently.

‘We rejoiced in slaying the enemies of the Lord ; with many tears and prayers and strivings we sought assurance of the Lord’s will and brought the tyrant to judgment. Thou and I put our names to his death-warrant ; thou and I will answer together for that deed before the Heavenly Throne, and I can say before Him who searcheth all hearts, I did this thing thinking His hand was in it,

and that the land could only be cleansed from blood by the blood of him who first shed blood. But thou, what canst thou say?—I slew this man that I might climb into his place, succeed to his power, sleep in his rich bed, have carnal honours for my children, and a high name for myself! Oh, Oliver, thou canst say nothing else!’

‘Before Him who made me a Joshua over this Israel I need no defence,’ answered His Highness simply. ‘He knoweth my poor heart and what He put therein—and how this miserable flesh, with many stumbles, tried to do His will. I am not afraid of my God. Leave Him to judge me and return to thy ancient faithfulness to me.’

‘Thou wert,’ said Harrison, ‘as the apple of mine eye, but now I loathe thee. Thou hast turned aside, and thou shalt not tempt me to follow thee, even if thou flatterest me, saying, “Come and sit on my right hand and share my power.”’

The Lord-Protector took a sharp turn about the room.

‘Thou art deluded, I plainly see,’ he said; ‘but it cannot be allowed that thou shouldst run into these excursions, though I have given thee a great latitude—I say that it cannot be allowed. I have with a great deal of patience suffered thee to sally out, but I perceive thou art misled, yea, and rebellious—surely we will have no rebellion.’

‘Do what you will with me,’ said Harrison calmly. ‘I will give my little poor testimony to the truth as I know it. Maybe I am a little mistaken, but I act according to my understanding, desiring to make the revealed Word of God in His Holy Scriptures my guide.’

‘Thou art mistaken,’ replied Cromwell gloomily. ‘Beware of a hard heart and an obdurate spirit. And beware of these Fifth Monarchy Men. They plot against the Commonwealth—they plot against my life.’

‘You believe that of me?’ asked Harrison sharply.

‘Why not?’ returned His Highness scornfully. ‘Thou hast put thy hand to the removal of one tyrant and may willingly desire to remove another.’

‘What I did against Charles Stewart was not done in a corner,’ said the Republican calmly, ‘nor should I act in a hidden way against you or against any one.’

'Nay,' said Cromwell impulsively, 'I believe it. Forgive me. But thou art in these Fifth Monarchy plots.'

'We do not plot,' returned Harrison, 'nor intrigue, whatever may be noised of us.'

'Thou mayst put what name thou wilt to it, Major-General Harrison,' said His Highness; 'but it is a known fact that thou seekest to disturb the Government and seduce the army.'

'I neither own the Government nor molest it. But wherefore these words? I do not seek to fly or in any way to save myself. Sir, I am in your power, both I and those poor hearts, those few redcoats who still hold the pure doctrine.'

'Thou knowest,' replied the Lord-Protector hastily, and with evident emotion, 'that I wish to be at peace with all men—even with the malignants.'

'Yea!' cried Thomas Harrison, with a flame of anger in his dark eyes, 'you have been very ready to make peace with Bael—to this has your tolerance led you!'

'I would that thou hadst a little more tolerance,' was the mild reply.

'These are vain words,' said the soldier impatiently. 'You and I have parted company long since. Our ways lie differently now. Tell me what you will of me and let this end.'

Oliver Cromwell looked at him fully and mournfully, then sighed.

'If thou wilt recognize the Government thou mayst live in peace for me.'

Thomas Harrison replied in a tone serene and unmoved—

'I will not; come what may, I will not.'

The Lord-Protector straightened his figure (which drooped a little in the shoulders of late), and then the blood slowly overspread his face.

'I shall not take this lightly,' he said; 'for my own dignity I may not take it lightly—I am the Governor of England. I have some authority.'

'The brief carnal power of a thing of clay,' replied Harrison with an exalted smile. 'Wherefore should I seek to please thee, who in a few years will be gone from this scene, leaving behind thy power and thy splendour?'

I listen to the voice of Him before whom thou and all the nations of the earth are less than a drop of water in the bucket ; my thoughts are fixed, not on this dusty sojourn here, but on those azure eternities which God giveth to His servants. Therefore I will not obey thee in this matter, for my conscience is against it.'

The Lord-Protector was silent a moment, then he spoke, in a tone from which all friendliness and pleading had gone.

'Then if you will not recognize the Government, you must cease to serve it. I shall ask for your commission.'

Major-General Harrison gently unfastened his sword thread and laid the plain weapon and the plain belt on a little table which stood near the Protector.

'There is my sword,' he said, 'which hath done some poor little service. Take it and let it rust.'

Cromwell remembered Marston Moor, Naseby, Basing, Oxford, many warm acts of friendship, many mutual prayers—all the old laborious, hopeful, triumphant days which they had shared.

He said nothing ; his hand went out as if yearningly and lovingly towards the weapon which he had so often seen red with the newly smitten blood of God's enemies.

He still did not speak, and his silence was stern.

Thomas Harrison took up his hat and cloak, and with a courteous but cold salute turned to take his leave.

His Highness turned to watch him and suddenly spoke, even as the other had his hand on the door.

'Thomas Harrison, it is very fitting that I make some defence to you. You have known me very well, and you believe hard, diabolic things of me. I would make some answer to this. I may bear the unkind thoughts of mine enemies, but I would be relieved of the ill-opinion of those who were once my friends.'

Harrison paused, and then turned with his back to the door, still unmoved and hostile, but attentive, as if compelled to that amount of respect by the rough, impassioned voice and fervent tones of the man for whom he would have given his life a few years ago. As he listened to his one-time beloved General, something of the old affection touched him, though faintly ; he waited.

'You accuse me of base ambition,' said His Highness,

lifting his head—his face had a look of a lion, mournful and infinitely strong—'but that failing I never had. You accuse me of grasping at the King's power, but that I never wanted. A man was needed—England, I say, had need of a man—but none came. Any of you could have come forward to take this place I hold—this place of no peace, little sleep, and endless labour—any of you! But you were not called, or you did not heed the call, you stepped aside—and England waited. I know not if you lacked courage, or if your conscience called you different ways—but none offered. And I, on in years and something broken by the wars, besought the Lord not to put this upon me—yet He did. And I did not shirk it. I obeyed Him as I did when I left London to form a troop in Cambridge that time the King did raise his standard against the people. Each time the Lord's breath was through me, as wind is through a hollow reed, and by Him I could do a little. That is my only merit. And England is something now—the home of His chosen. You were nice, you hesitated, you made punctilios—but I heard the call and saw the light, as oft in the battalion, and I obeyed. I have tried many ways of government, each as it comes to my hand. What my position truly is I know not—I am a parish constable set to keep the peace. Yet here I be, by God's will, and here I do my work. You may judge me with charity, Thomas Harrison, as one upon whom a very heavy burden hath been laid.'

He paused, and his head drooped.

'There is no more to say,' he added, and his rough voice had fallen lower. 'Farewell—"God watch between me and thee when we are absent from one and another."'

'Amen,' said Thomas Harrison.

And so they parted.

The Lord-Protector stood lonely in the rich chamber, which had been furnished by the dead King and the banished Queen.

He went to the window and looked on the spring fairness of the garden, on the warm glitter of the river and the sails going down to the sea.

His greatness oppressed him in that moment, and he was homesick for the past and the uneventful days of his youth.

CHAPTER VII

LADY NEWCASTLE

THROUGH the mingled splendour and distress, brightness and confusion of these years of the Lord-Protector's ruling in England, while the glory of England rose to a perilous height (her renown glittered as the foam on a wave cast for a moment into the sun—soon to fall into the darkness of the waters again and to be lost), while Oliver Cromwell shone refulgent in all men's eyes, the Lady Elisabeth Claypole, moving from her husband's house to her father's palaces, and in all places greatly loved, faded visibly and pitifully.

She had always been an advocate of mercy, and many a Cavalier owed his life or his estate to her pleadings, and there was no one, however he might hate Cromwell, who had not a gentle thought for this daughter of his. Among her keen, delicate sisters she showed yet more keen and delicate, and though she had now lost the fresh English fairness which bloomed in the Lady Mary and the Lady Frances, and which had become womanly grace in Bridget Fleetwood, yet of all of them she was the most lovable. If any wished a favour from the Lord-Protector it was to her they went to ask her intercession, for as her illness and her weakness grew and her end came nearer, nearer with every painful breath she drew, His Highness' tender love increased into an agony of yearning, until it seemed as if he could refuse her nothing.

One April, when His Highness was deep in great affairs—letters to Cardinal Mazarin, letters to General Blake now sailing victorious in foreign waters, questions of his taking the title of King, questions of the Fifth Monarchy Men having broken out rebelliously at last, and Thomas Harrison being in the Tower for abetting them—a suppliant came to Hampton with a very earnest entreaty to be allowed to see the Lord-Protector. Whereat John Thurloe, His Highness' faithful secretary, was indignant almost beyond the bounds of courtesy, and mighty angry with the servants who had let the lady get as far as the antechamber.

'Lackeys,' said she, on hearing his complaint, 'are still used to pay respect to princesses.'

But he told her she could by no means see His Highness, and he spoke so firmly that she sadly turned away.

'Alas!' she murmured, 'that I should be sent like a beggar from the door of a usurper!'

John Thurloe regarded her sharply.

'Had you been a man, madam, you would have had to answer for that remark.'

The lady turned and seemed about to reply, when Elisabeth Claypole chanced to pass the open door, and, seeing a stranger there, she entered.

'Who is this?' she asked.

'A lady who will not give her name,' said the secretary dryly; 'but no one can see His Highness now.'

'My name,' said the stranger, with that air of fantastic dignity which disguised her haggard sadness, 'is something too great to be bandied about here—but give me yours, madam.'

'I am Elisabeth Claypole, madam,' returned the Protector's daughter mildly.

The lady swept a courtly courtesy.

'There is no need,' she replied, 'for me to disguise my quality from one so generous and good. I am, madam, the wife of the unfortunate Marquess of Newcastle.'

This name, which a few years ago had been one of the greatest in the land, and still echoed in the minds of men, had an effect on John Thurloe and even on Elisabeth herself. The new order had not endured long enough for people to have eradicated the instinct of respect for noble blood and ancient names; for a moment the Marchioness in her poor attire, abashed the two commoners, so strong still were tradition and the old teaching.

Then Elisabeth Claypole spoke.

'Will you come with me, madam, and take a little poor hospitality?'

Thurloe, glad to be relieved of the responsibility of the distinguished petitioner, put in his word.

'I will give Your Grace's name to His Highness presently, but I do fear it is useless.'

'Come with me, madam,' repeated the Lady Elisabeth,

and she gently took the Marchioness by the hand and led her to her apartment.

Lady Newcastle came meekly ; for all her air of pride she was downcast and bewildered with misfortune.

The Lady Elisabeth's room looked on the river, now shaded by willow trees covered with drooping yellow and red leaves, the banks were grown with tall grasses and rushes, and the first pale flowers of spring, beyond the soft fields, faded into the soft sky.

Elisabeth Claypole loved to sit day after day at her deep window gazing on that scene, watching the river that wandered through such pleasant ways through the great city, past the palace, past the Traitor's Gate, out to the wonder and turmoil of the open sea.

She put a chair for the Marchioness and herself sank into the window seat, glancing swiftly at her guest. She saw a lady of a medium loveliness, most piteously worn and marred by sorrow, and attired in a tasteful if unusual style, which gave her the appearance of being richly dressed ; but Elisabeth's quick eyes saw that the grey silk dress had been turned and scoured, that the ruffles of lace had been darned again and again, and that she wore no jewels. The Protector's daughter felt ashamed of her own velvet gown and the valuable pearls she had in her ears.

'I wished to see your father, madam,' said Lady Newcastle, in a voice where fatigue and humiliation struggled with a natural pride.

'Alas !' murmured Elisabeth, 'he is so pressed with business—will you tell your errand to me, my Lady Newcastle ?'

'I have come to England in company with my brother-in-law to endeavour to obtain some remnant of my husband's estates,' was the answer. 'And we were returning in despair, when I, unknown to him, thought to make this personal appeal.'

The Lady Elisabeth knew at once that the unfortunate gentlewoman had made an utterly hopeless journey, for she was well aware that one of the late King's generals, and a royalist so notable as the Marquess of Newcastle, could never obtain grace from the Commonwealth.

Wishful, as ever, to avoid inflicting pain rudely, she made an evasive answer.

'Will your lord swear fealty to the Government, madam?'

'Nay—do you take him for a disloyal wretch?' flashed the Duchess.

'Then,' replied Elisabeth, with something of her pride roused, 'I wonder that you should have undertaken the labour of this journey.'

A pallor overshadowed the royalist lady's features, and she hung her head, as if she heard in these words the full extent of her miseries and the depths of her humiliations.

'Could you see how the exiles live in Paris, in Rotterdam—in Antwerp,' she answered—'all of us—even the Queen—you would not wonder at my endeavour, however foolish, to obtain some relief.'

It was the Protector's daughter who paled now; the thought of the English exiles wandering miserably through Europe had constantly haunted her.

'You are then in distress?' she asked, in a low voice.

'In the greatest poverty,' replied Lady Newcastle, her pride melting before the touch of tenderness, and the tears suddenly reddening her eyes. 'The French King makes nothing of us; he is all for an alliance with the usurper—with your father. The Princess of Orange can do nothing for us, for, since her husband died, the Netherlands have put down her son and so—and so——' She paused to command herself, then continued: 'Do not think I complain for myself. My lord was ruined when I married him in Paris. I took him for great and exceeding love, as he did me, seeing I was dowerless, and I make it no hardship to share his exiled wanderings with him—but there are so many others even wanting bread—and Her Majesty and the Princess Henrietta are in such distress—— But not to you should I speak of these things. I would only explain how it is that I have so far lowered my dignity as to come here on this errand.'

Elisabeth Claypole caught a glimpse of the sufferings, poverties, and misery of the exiled English in this speech, given so humbly, so haltingly, yet with the accent of a pride unquenched.

My lady dashed the tears from her eyes with a laced handkerchief.

'I am Margaret Lucas,' she added, 'and well used to misfortunes. I came to England to try what I could do, but I found no friend anywhere, nor any one who would bring me before your father. So I came to-day—wildly and foolishly, it might be—to ask if he would give my lord his rights.'

'I would not give you false hopes,' replied the Lady Elisabeth. 'My Lord's estate is forfeit, and no entreaties of yours or mine could avail to restore it.'

'Entreaties?' cried Lady Newcastle. 'I fear I could not entreat——'

She abruptly checked her sentence, but Elisabeth knew well enough that some hard thing against the Protector had been on her tongue.

'Have patience, my lady, this life is very short and full of sadness. All these great affairs and great pains will soon be past, and others will be in our places while we shall be at rest—up there'—she pointed to the sky—'above it all, God grant!'

'You speak as if you too were unfortunate!' said the Marchioness wonderingly. 'Surely, Mrs. Claypole, you do not need philosophy to sweeten your lot.'

'I am dying,' answered Elisabeth Claypole. 'And I am young and have much on this earth that I love, also I suffer very greatly—so much that I wish I could die quicker. Therefore,' she added sweetly, 'you see that I have not found the world wholly pleasant, and why I long for these mansions God hath prepared for us above.'

My lady's warm heart was greatly moved by this touching confession.

'Forgive me, I did not know,' she answered; 'but I dare hope you are mistaken——'

'Those who love me deceive themselves, but I know,' smiled Elisabeth. 'I am not afraid to die—but sometimes, madam, I am a coward before the pain, the great pain,'—then, hastily turning the subject from herself, she added,—'I mix not at all in business, I know my father doeth God's work—yet I am most grieved for you and such as you, for all the blood shed, for all the misery.'

Ah me!—our day is now, we seem very glorious, but what doth it all hang on? My father's life—no more. And it may be that we too shall end and come to nothing and your turn come again. I know not. Sometimes life seems very far away from me, as if I surveyed it from a distance, and saw it all blurred and vague.'

'How many sad women I have seen!' exclaimed Margaret. 'The Queen—you would not know her—an old woman, all burnt away with fiery tears; Lady Strafford, all broken and silenced; Lady William Pawlet, who hath crept into a convent and is as near a nun as a widow may be—and myself—how I have wept—mine eyes are weakened for ever because of tears. It was for Charles, my dear, dear brother . . . you know they shot him, poor gallant soldier, outside Colchester. . . . Your father was guiltless of that, or nothing had brought me here to-day.'

Elisabeth did not answer; Cromwell was certainly not responsible for the military executions, so harsh and unnecessary, of Lucas and Lisle after the siege of Colchester; but it had been the work of Bridget's first husband, Henry Ireton (a man whom she had never liked), and so she could not condemn the action though her heart cried out against it. The Marchioness rose, and the gentle April sunlight flicked the scoured silk, the darned lace, the face so peaked and worn for one so young.

'Well, well,' she said, with quivering lips, 'one goes on living—but the world is never the same after these things have happened. How differently I dreamed it would be!'

'I also,' answered Elisabeth Claypole. 'I never thought of death at all. Far, far off I fancied him, and behold, he was knocking at the door. But the world does not heed poor silly women, madam; we are but the dust bruised by the tramplings of great events; nations march past and leave us weeping. God send you a good deliverance from your sorrows. I will do what little I can, and ask my father to receive your petition, but well I know it hopeless.'

'I thank you,' said Margaret; 'from my heart I thank you for your good, your generous, graciousness. I cannot think of you as my enemy——'

'Why should you?' cried Elisabeth. 'We are both English women. I hope the day is near when all such shall be united.'

She rose and unlatched the lattice, and a fresh air blew in from the young leaves that quivered on the willows and the young grass that waved in the fields.

'The river!' said Margaret, looking over her shoulder. 'I often dream of the river, it seems woven through everything—twisted in and out of the past years and all their story. In Paris, among strangers, I think of the river, and grow sad with home-sickness. The river is very dear—and means so much.'

'I think so too,' said Elisabeth. 'Consider how it will flow on the same, hundreds of years hence, when all the present kingdoms of the earth will be dust like yester year's roses.'

'I hope I shall die in England,' said my lady irrelevantly; 'and now farewell,' she added bravely. 'Forgive me my sad coming.'

'Come again,' interrupted the Lady Elisabeth, taking her hand. 'I may have news for you. Where do you lodge?'

'With Mrs. Brydon, a cousin of my father over against the Exchange. I am called Mrs. Lucas there, for any pomp is foolish in such sorry circumstances.'

'Come again in a few weeks—my father is so occupied with the Spanish War—but I will speak to him of my lord's estates. Yet I can promise nothing,' she added reluctantly.

'Yet I love you dearly for the kindness,' replied Margaret, holding out her hands.

Elisabeth took them in her own frail fingers; these two women were strangely drawn to one another.

'I pray Heaven you will recover,' added the Marchioness. 'I think you will recover. Madam, you will live to be very happy.'

'God may make me happy,' said Elisabeth, 'but not on the earth now.'

'Nay, you will live to encourage other unfortunates as you have encouraged me.'

Both of them had tears in their eyes; obeying a

mutual impulse, they bent and kissed each other on the cheek.

Elisabeth came with Margaret to the outer door of her apartments, and there gave her in charge to one of the ushers to be conducted from the palace with all courtesy.

Before she returned to her chamber she asked if His Highness was at leisure.

She was told that he was deeply engaged with his secretary on the questions to be put before the Council when he returned to Whitehall to-morrow.

Lady Newcastle returned to an alien London, and sat down in her forlorn and ancient splendour to write to her beloved lord in Antwerp, where he lodged in the house of the late King's painter, Sir Peter Rubens.

As the shadows fell over the city, over the fresh countryside, over the river, as the night moths came out and the early stocks and pinks in the gardens at Hampton Palace filled the air with sweetness, His Highness still toiled in his cabinet, and Elisabeth Claypole still sat at the open window of her room with folded hands and thoughtful eyes gazing across the twilight.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LADY ELISABETH

WHEN the Marchioness of Newcastle, after waiting long and vainly, returned at length to Hampton Court and asked for the Lady Elisabeth, she was told that the Protector's daughter was too ill to see any one.

After lingering a little, and trying other sources of communication with the Court and finding none, she returned sadly with her husband's brother to Antwerp to take up again her exiled life.

All through that summer and autumn Elisabeth Claypole had seemed sinking down to death. She knew little of what passed : of how, after long debates, His Highness had refused the title of King (' a feather in his cap,' he called it ; a feather he would fain have had, many said, only the army had willed otherwise), but had been in-

stalled in purple and ermine as Lord-Protector of the new-formed Constitution and presented with Bible and sword ; of how ambassadors had come and gone in England and the war with Spain proceeded brilliantly ; how plots were formed and exposed and His Highness went in a continual fear of his life that was beginning to undermine his calm nerves and resolute courage, and of how he and his generals toiled continually——

Of all this Elisabeth Claypole knew little ; she was scarcely conscious of more than the darkened room in which she lay and of the figures of her mother and sisters coming and going softly, of her husband grieving by her bed, and her father's presence in such moments as he could spare to hold her hand and speak comforting words to her tired ears.

By the spring they thought that they had cured her ; but in the summer she drooped again, though she went to the marriage of her sister Frances with young Mr. Rich, the Earl of Warwick's heir.

Frances was the last to wed, for Mary was now Lady Fauconberg. Many finer matches had been suggested for this youngest of the Protector's daughters ; some had even tried to bring about a marriage between her and Charles Stewart, and the women of His Highness' family had favoured this scheme, but Cromwell waved it aside—' If he could forgive his father's death, I could not forgive the loose manner of his life '—and Frances had wedded, after much opposition, Mr. Rich, a delicate youth.

In the June of this year of 1658 came the great news of the fall of Dunkirk, the defeat of the Spanish, and the flattering friendship of the French. London glittered with a congratulatory embassy from Paris ; in the midst of the pageantry, His Highness, who had already interfered once to save the poor people of the valleys of Piedmont, was once more extending his mighty protection to them, and Mr. Milton, the Latin Secretary to the Council of State, was turning His Highness' letters into Latin : Mr. Milton dictated his translations now, for he was lately become utterly blind.

The news of the battle of the Dunes raised England to a yet higher point of fame than she had yet reached.

France could refuse such an ally nothing, and Mazarin interfered to protect the Piedmontese.

So went affairs abroad and in England well too, save that the finances were strained, His Highness having dissolved the Parliament in February, preferring, indeed, to govern without one.

'God be judge between you and me,' were the concluding words of his last speech.

Other sorrows beside the illness of his daughter visited His Highness this summer: Mr. Rich died a few months after his marriage, leaving poor Frances a widow at seventeen; the old Earl of Warwick died, an ancient friend of the Protector; most painful and terrible loss of all, the youngest son of the Lady Elisabeth died, and she fell again into illness and was soon at a desperate extremity.

In between his entertainment of the French ambassadors at Whitehall, his conferences with his Council, and all the routine of government, His Highness would take his coach and drive to Hampton, and sit for a while in his child's darkened chamber and pray with tears that her agony might be lessened.

His own health began to suffer. Those about him noticed that the deep gloom which had settled on his spirits was affecting his strength; he still looked and seemed in every way younger, much younger than his years; he had a great appearance of strength; he gave the impression of being firmly built, and set, and able to endure for a great while yet the powerful winds which buffeted his high and glorious pinnacle of splendour.

Yet those most with him, especially Thurloe, his ardent and faithful secretary, thought that underneath this calm and strong exterior he was much shaken in mind and health. His domestic sorrows were known to affect him sorely, his nerves were strained to breaking-point by the constant apprehension of assassination, the future was believed to weigh on him, for there was no settlement of the country for any period longer than his life, and it became daily more apparent how the whole fabric of Puritan government depended on that life, on his unique position and influence with the army, on the dominating

force of his personality, on the glory of his prestige and the glamour of his genius.

He had always seemed so vigorous, and glowing with the light and the fire of an immortal spirit that no one associated him with age or death or thought about his successor ; but it was possible that to himself, as the atmosphere of death chilled his home, might come the reflection that the England of his making was as baseless as the Greece of Alexander, and might as easily fall to pieces at his death—only his captains were not the men to divide the spoils. What, then, would follow ?

He may well have asked himself that question and pondered over it in these dark days.

The Lord Richard, his eldest surviving son, was a mere country gentleman, with neither strength nor talents—nay, rather of an indolent turn and a certain softness ; to set him to hold together the various elements which controlled the nation would be to invite certain failure.

The Lord Henry, his second son, was as able a man as any about him and already of much distinction in his military and diplomatic career ; but he was not the man to step into another's place : ambition did not spur his noble qualities. Then there were the Lord Fleetwood, his son-in-law, the Lord Lambert, Disbrowe, many fine, fearless soldiers, Blake, Monck. But where was *the* man—the one pre-eminently marked out to continue the work of His Highness ?

No one could point to such an one. The Lord-Protector had the right of naming his successor, but as yet had not done so ; the new-founded Constitution (the last attempt to frame a civil government on the foundations of arbitrary military power) was scarcely complete, and after these last glorious successes in the Spanish War there was further persistent talk of a kingship for the Protector. Many said this title was a certain thing ; but it was a thing yet pending, and with it the question of the succession.

There were many jars and confusions, too, in the inner state of England that might well weigh on the spirit of the Protector. His body was worn with gout and a slight but lingering aguish fever. He might neglect none of his business, and maintain the appearance of mental and

physical strength, but John Thurloe, his constant companion, was not deceived.

'His Highness,' he said to Whitelocke, 'is a sick man, and these vigils by the Lady Elisabeth will wear him to a great disease.'

That summer was notable for the fierceness of the heat : day by day the sun beat down without either rain or cloud, night after night the stars shone with unveiled brilliance ; then towards the beginning of August a light wind blew for several days and cooled the air. Elisabeth Claypole seemed to rally a little as the great heat was relieved, and His Highness, who had left business for several days lately to watch by her, thought it safe to return to London, where the French notables were still being entertained.

On Friday the 6th of August he came back to Hampton Court ; he came in a coach, for, having lately been flung from his carriage, he was too shaken to ride on horseback. That day he had been more than usually cheerful ; he had even smiled at the reports from France : tales of how his Ironsides (oh, irony !), now fighting there side by side with the followers of the Scarlet Lady, had given their General trouble by their behaviour in the churches of the idolaters, one lighting his pipe from the candle on the high altar. Then he heard how Mr. Hugh Peters had endeavoured to make long sermons before the magnificent Cardinal, hoping to convert him from his deep errors.

At the name of Mr. Hugh Peters His Highness smiled no more ; it recalled to him strangely that winter morning in Whitehall when he had paced the boarded gallery in sick agitation, and Hugh Peters, in his black clothes, had gone out to the scaffold and helped knock a staple in and hurried to and fro in enthusiastic excitement. . . . It seemed so long ago . . . and now this same Hugh Peters was arguing with Cardinal Mazarin, and the young King of France was sending him a rich sword with a jewelled hilt . . . a King who was the nephew of that other King who had knelt down at the block that January morning.

His Highness did not set much store by this costly sword : his victories had been won with plainer weapons.

While he was in his coach, hastening towards Hampton, he took from his pocket a pamphlet which was then making

much stir in England. The title was *Killing no Murder*, and it set forth with much eloquence that any murderer of Oliver Cromwell would be justified by God and man.

His Highness read the paper from beginning to end, then put it back in his pocket.

'There is no notice to be taken of such things,' said John Thurloe, who sat opposite him.

'It is no matter one way or another,' answered His Highness; and he took from his bosom a small Bible and gave it to Thurloe and asked him to read from it aloud, 'For,' he said, 'I feel my eyes tired.'

'What shall I read?' asked the secretary, leaning towards the light of the window and unclasping the Book: the coach had just turned by Turnham Green and the road was smooth.

'Read,' said the Lord-Protector, 'the fourth of St. Paul to the Philippians, the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth verses—read aloud in a strong voice.'

Which John Thurloe did.

"Not that I speak in respect of want: but I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere, and by all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

His Highness repeated the last sentence.

"*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*" This Scripture did once save my life,' he added, 'when my eldest son, poor Robert, died, which went as a dagger to my heart—indeed, it did.'

He paused and John Thurloe looked up, startled to hear him refer to a sorrow so ancient. But Cromwell's thoughts seemed to be in the past.

'In my great extremity,' he continued, 'I did read these passages of Paul's contention—of the submission to the will of God in all conditions; and it was hard—indeed, it was hard. In my weakness I said, "It is true, Paul, *you* have learned this, and attained to this measure of grace; but what shall *I* do? Ah, poor creature, it is a hard lesson for me to take out. I find it so!" But reading on

to the thirteenth verse, where Paul saith, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,*" then faith began to work and my heart to find support, saying to myself, "He that was Paul's Christ is my Christ too!"—and so I drew waters out of the well of salvation.'

'Why should Your Highness remind yourself of this?' asked Thurloe anxiously.

'Oh, Thurloe!' cried the Lord^dProtector, with a great sigh, 'it is to nerve myself in case another of my children should be taken from me. If she should die—it would be almost more than I could bear. Yet God might take her, though I have wrestled with Him for her life, even as David wrestled for the life of his son. My brave, sweet one! She was always good and loving, was she not, Thurloe? Wonderful and inscrutable are His ways that He should lay such suffering and agonies on one so delicate and valiant!'

The secretary had no more to say; neither did His Highness speak again, but gazed out of the window at the sun-dried countryside, at the orchards where the dry wind blew the shrivelled leaves of red and gold from the fruit too early ripe, at the great elms and oaks rustling the foliage to the ground, at the thatched and gabled cottages where the children ran to the doors to watch the coach with the four horses and outriders and the troop of Life Guards go by.

Soon they came in sight of the river, with islands and barges and reaches, where the boats were drawn above the tide, and a few boys fished, knee-deep in mud.

Then they lost the river and passed between private mansions standing among trees, and so to the village of Hampton as the sun was sinking in a glow of unstained fire.

As they neared the Palace His Highness became very pale, and he looked once or twice with an air of dread from the window, as if he expected to see some awful change over the place.

But no scene could have been more peaceful; the river flowed softly between the fading willows and the banks where the tall grasses, white whorls of hemlock, and clusters of parsley flowers grew; the last light of the sun glowed on the red bricks of the Palace and cast long

shadows from the summer flowers in the garden ; up among the high chimney-stacks white pigeons fluttered home with light upon their wings.

Cromwell entered the Palace. The first to meet him was one of the grooms of his chamber ; the man gave him a frightened look and moved away without speaking.

He went towards his daughter's apartments, and in the corridor Frances Rich, a child in widow's mourning, came towards him with staggering steps.

He paused.

' Oh, my father ! ' she said, and lifted a face swollen with weeping.

' What is it, my dear ? ' he asked, in a still voice. ' Be calm, my child, my dear.'

He took her trembling little figure by the shoulder and smoothed back the damp hair from her forehead.

' Is she dead ? ' he asked. ' Is she gone—is Betty dead, dear ? '

' Oh, my father ! ' sobbed poor Frances again, and seemed unable to find other words.

Elisabeth Cromwell came down the passage, and with her the Lord Claypole.

' Ah,' said His Highness, ' is it over ? And I left her—yet only for a little—and she is gone.'

His wife came and put her arms round his neck and wept on his shoulder a little, then she took his hand and led him to their daughter's chamber, followed by those two other mourners, also sick with grief and watching.

Elisabeth Claypole lay dead, she had fallen from one convulsion fit to another, and breathed her last breath, in great pain and suffering, but with a composed and cheerful mind and a serene and hopeful soul.

She was dead ; very young she looked as she lay in the great bed in the darkened chamber with the shadows over her ; the rich coverlet was straightened across her limbs, the sheet smoothed, the pillow shaken ; she was at peace after the long tossings to and fro, the hot nights of agony, the dragging days of unconsciousness.

Very small she looked and delicate ; her hair seemed like a handful of fine silk on the pillow, her hands white flowers on the coverlet ; her head was drooping slightly

sideways, and the gentle look she wore in life had returned, effacing all trace of suffering.

There were many standing round her ; all made way at the approach of His Highness ; he came up to the bed and looked down at her.

“ “ My life is waxen old with heaviness,” ’ he murmured, “ “ and my years with mourning. . . . I am become like a broken vessel.” ’ ”

He bent over her stillness, his transient sorrow breaking vainly against her eternal repose.

“ “ Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord,” ’ said Elisabeth Cromwell, and touched her husband’s hand.

He went to his knees on the bed-step and put his head on his folded hands.

‘ May He who sitteth above the waterflood comfort me—for in myself I can do nothing ! ’ he muttered.

They left him there, for they thought that he prayed ; but it was not so : the valiant spirit had been robbed of its matchless fortitude at last ; His Highness was in a swoon of anguish.

CHAPTER IX

EXIT HIS HIGHNESS

FROM that day he sickened rapidly ; his strength fell from him with a suddenness that amazed those about him. He attended business as usual, wearing the purple of royal mourning, but the heaviness of his spirit was noticed by all.

Towards the end of August, George Fox, the Quaker, came to Hampton Court to see His Highness about the persecution of the Friends ; he went by river, and soon after he stepped ashore at Hampton he saw His Highness riding at the head of his Life Guards, going towards the palace under the shade of the riverside trees.

George Fox waited until the cavalcade, which was coming slowly towards him, into Hampton Court Park, had reached him, gazing steadily the while at that figure of His Highness, drooping a little in the saddle and looking ahead of him, with an extraordinary air of stillness.

‘I felt and saw,’ wrote Fox afterwards when he was back in his cobbler’s shop in London, ‘a waft of death go forth against him, and when I came to him he looked like a dead man.’

His Highness was very courteous ; he checked his horse when he saw the patient figure, russet-clad, with the broad-brimmed hat, waiting for him, and welcomed Fox as warmly as he had done two years before when the Quaker saw him at Hyde Park corner among his Guards, and pressed to his carriage window, and spoke to him gravely—as he spoke to him now, warning him, and laying before him the sufferings of the Friends, even as the spirit moved him to do.

His Highness listened ; the stillness of his demeanour, remarkable in one naturally so full of energy and eloquence, did not alter ; he said very little, only kindly bade Fox come and see him at his house next day.

And so he rode on slowly towards the red palace, ‘and I,’ wrote Fox in his *Journal*, ‘never saw him more.’

For the following day, when he came from Kingston to Hampton again, the doctors would let no one see His Highness, who was fallen worse—of a tertian ague, they said—and would never ride at the head of his famous Guard again, either through Hampton Court Park or anywhere else. George Fox had been the last to see the Lord-Protector on horseback, girt with a sword.

Soon after he was moved by coach to London, where the air was thought to be better for his complaint ; St. James’s Palace, that he intended to lodge at, not being immediately ready, he was taken to Whitehall, and on the Wednesday following half the nation was praying for him, and half waiting breathlessly, ‘for a great deliverance.’

In Whitehall, a meeting of preachers and godly persons besought God with prayers and tears to spare His Highness, and all over the city were apprehension, expectation, hopes, fears, and supplication.

So it had come to this : the twenty years of great events, with all the toil, achievement, triumph, tumult, and sorrow, had swept up to this moment when the gentleman farmer from St. Ives, who had received a command

from God, lay dying at Whitehall, with that command executed as far as it is in a man to accomplish a mission he conceives Divine, dying, with England breathless, and the son of the late tyrant breathless too, and watching and waiting from across the water.

It seemed to many valiant souls as if this England so violently shaped anew into something of the form which was the ideal of Puritanism, purged and glorified, was no more than the vivified dream of this one man, and that when he passed from the earth it would be as when a sleeper wakes—the dream would be dispelled and all things become as they had been.

What he himself might think, now that he knew the summons had come, none could tell, for he was mostly silent during the ebb and flow of his illness, and only spoke to pray; once or twice the passionate entreaties to God, which he heard rising around him, and the passionate affection of his family and friends, seemed to rouse in him a desire and hope of life. He could not but know that his work was not yet finished, and that this was not the best of times for him to die.

‘Lord, Thou knowest,’ he said, ‘that if I do desire to live, it is to show forth Thy praise and declare Thy works!’ and, ‘Is there none that says, Who will deliver me from this peril?’ then, ‘Man can do nothing; God can do what He will.’

And at times he fell into a kind of enthusiasm, speaking much of the Covenants of Works and of Grace and expounding them; to his wife and children, who felt their very life being torn from them, he spoke, too: ‘Love not this world’—he repeated the words with great vehemence, as was his wont—‘I say, love not this world; it is not good that you should love this world—children, live like Christians. I leave you the Covenant to feed on!’

But for the most he had done with human affection; weeping did not seem to touch that heart that had once been so tender to tears.

He did not even look at those about him, but upwards at the dark canopy of his bed; and to that inner eye which had beheld the sword stretched out of the cloud in the

barn at St. Ives, it was no covering of tapestry which hung above him, but the threshold of the eternal world.

The dry wind, which had begun before the Lady Elisabeth died, and blown for weeks across the Island from sea to sea, deepened and strengthened now from day to day, and at the end of this month of August, when His Highness was rapidly coming to the end of all storms and calms alike, a hurricane of wind arose—the most fearful, violent, and protracted any man could remember.

It was drawing near to that most glorious day for Oliver Cromwell and his cause, the 3rd of September, the anniversary of Dunbar and Worcester, and of the calling of the first Parliament of His Highness—a day of general thanksgivings and triumph to all Puritans.

As the stormy winds rocked Whitehall Palace and rattled at the window out of which Charles Stewart had stepped to die, and at the window of the room where the Lord-Protector lay, His Highness rallied from his slumbers and sat upright in his great bed and listened to the tempest, as a soldier might sit up in the dark and listen the night before a battle.

‘ I think I am the poorest wretch alive,’ he said, ‘ but I love God, or, rather, am beloved by Him—I am a conqueror and more than a conqueror—“ *through Christ which strengtheneth me* ” ’—so he repeated again the words which had saved him once, long ago. But as he sat up, hearkening to the blowing winds without, his comfort seemed to go from him.

‘ It is a fearful thing,’ he said, ‘ to fall into the hands of the Living God ! ’

He raised himself up and stretched out his hand towards the wind as if he appealed to something in that tumult outside his palace.

‘ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God ! ’ he cried again.

So high and loud the wind howled that those about him shivered as if they feared to be struck by some supernatural force ; but Cromwell sat erect, and again cried out, ‘ I say it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God ! ’

One of the chaplains praying in the adjoining chamber

heard his Highness' raised and agonized voice and entered the sick-room.

To him Oliver Cromwell turned eagerly.

'*Tell me,*' he asked, in a voice of intense wistfulness, '*is it possible to fall from Grace?*'

'Nay,' said the pastor, 'it is not possible.'

'*Then,*' said the dying man, '*I am saved, for I know that I was once in Grace.*'

He clasped his hands, and the family and friends about him, whom he seemed to have forgotten, heard, in the pauses of the wind, his prayer—

'Lord, though I am a miserable and wretched creature, I am in Covenant with Thee through Grace! And I may—I will—come to Thee, for Thy people! Thou hast made me, though very unworthy, a mean instrument to do them some good, and Thee service—many of them have set too high a value on me, others wish and would be glad of my death—Lord, however Thou do dispose of me, continue and go on and do good for them.'

His voice rose now like the voice of a well man, almost as strong as the voice that had greeted with a psalm the rising sun before Dunbar.

'Give them consistency of judgment, one heart, and mutual love—and go on to deliver them, and with the work of reformation—and make the name of Christ glorious in the world. Teach those who look too much on Thy Instruments to depend more upon Thyself. Pardon such as desire to trample on the dust of a poor worm, for they are Thy people too.

'And pardon the folly of this short prayer—even for Jesus Christ's sake. And give us a good night, if it be Thy pleasure. Amen!'

And after this he lay down among his pillows and slept, despite the storm.

And there began to be whispers about the succession, which hitherto no one had dared name.

The faithful Thurloe approached his bed and asked him who was to be his successor.

At which His Highness turned his head and was silent.

'The Lord Richard?' whispered Thurloe, and the Lord-Protector was believed to answer, 'Yes, yes,' but no man

could be sure of what he said. Henry Cromwell was absent; the rest of his family were near him, but he seemed to forget them. Only twice he asked intensely for '*Robert, Robert*, my eldest son.'

He fell now into great pains, but with them came great cheerfulness of spirit.

'God is good,' he was heard to say—'indeed, He is—God is good—my work is done. Yet God be with His people.'

On the eve of the thanksgiving day, which shall never be kept as a thanksgiving day again, save by an oppressed people, secretly in their hearts, the victor of the battles which made the 3rd of September glorious was seen to be very near the end of his restlessness and his pain.

His sad, forlorn wife (who saw but dark days ahead of her) besought him to drink and sleep and held out a cup to him.

'It is not my design to drink or sleep,' he answered, 'but my design is to make what haste I can to be gone.'

All through the windy night he prayed brokenly; once he spoke of Harrison, and seemed troubled; once he asked God to spare Betty further pain, and again he said, 'Is Robert dead?—and Oliver?'

When the sun was up over city and golden river, and the vast crowds waiting anxiously, His Highness had fallen to silence.

That afternoon the Lord ungirt the sword with which He had invested His Captain twenty years before, and in Whitehall Palace Oliver Cromwell's lifeless body lay—and the nation flew asunder into confusion.

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